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BRIGHT
LIGHTS

Ostrander, Isabel

BRIGHT LIGHTS

BY
ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD

*Author of "The Second Bullet," "Unseen
Hands," "Above Suspicion," etc.*



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BRIGHT LIGHTS

CHAPTER I

YOUTH STUFF

“**I** DECLARE, Mis’ Moffat, I don’t see how you do it! You look younger’n ever!” Mrs. Horton bustled into her shabby, comfortable boarding-house parlor and held out both fat hands in cordial greeting to her biennially returning guest. “It beats me how you folks from the Middle West seem to keep two jumps ahead of the styles!”

The buyer from Columbia, Ohio, smiled and the tiny, well-massaged lines about her dark, clear eyes and humorously curved mouth crinkled.

“We have to! Do you suppose Sol Feingold would have been sending me here more years than I care to count for the new lines in ladies’ and misses’ ready-to-wear if I didn’t look as young as the flappiest finale-hopper with a charge account—at least from the rear?” She laughed, displaying her strong, white teeth, and then sighed. “You’re lucky to be in a business where flesh doesn’t matter; how I’m going to resist the temptation of your pies the Lord only knows! But how is your family here? Simmy still with you, of course?”

“Yes, but I shouldn’t wonder if somebody wasn’t tak-

ing notice of him at last, though I can't figger who. Talking of fat, he goes to a gymnasium two nights a week reducing and he dresses more snappy than ever. If he does get married, I declare I sh'll miss him 'round the house after all this time! Daisy Larkin's gone back home to take care of her mother, Ralph Best and Pete Cook went out to Chicago to start business together and Laura Jennifer—well, it got to be too plain and quiet for her here." The motherly face clouded but brightened again. "Henry Jordan's with me still and little Fannie Gillespie and Myrtle Harris."

But one name had arrested Mrs. Moffat's attention.

"What do you mean, too plain and quiet for that Jennifer girl, Mrs. Horton?" she demanded. "Thirty a week was what she drew down, modeling coats and suits for Marx & Lefkowitz, and she wasn't worth half of it when I bought some whipcords there last fall, slouching on the job and making eyes at the men buyers! Where did she move to, the Ritz?"

"She's got a little flat somewhere. I was real sorry to lose her, for Laura was a nice girl, but good times and the bright lights went to her head. Put the tea down here, Aggie, and take Mis' Moffat's grip up to her room."

Mrs. Horton turned with evident relief as a scrawny, middle-aged housemaid with untidy hair and a perpetually harried expression on her pointed face placed a tray awkwardly on the center table.

"You'd better toast a coupla pieces of that bread——"

"Not for me!" Mrs. Moffat interrupted decidedly.

"Nothing between meals; thirty-fours are the rage now and I'm still thirty-six! . . . So the Jennifer girl turned out to be a weak sister? You've got another one that seemed to me to be heading that way, covering herself with cheap, fake jewelry and going without lunch for new clothes; I mean Fannie Gillespie."

"Indeed she ain't!" Mrs. Horton asserted vigorously. "Fannie's a sweet little thing and good as gold! It's natural for her to like finery, and all them rhinestone di'monds—well, you know how it is when a young girl first comes to New York from a small place——"

"Some girls," Mrs. Moffat corrected as she stirred her tea. There was amused affection in the glance she cast upon her landlady. "Ruffle up like a mother hen, don't you, when any one criticizes your chicks!"

"Well, I kind of take an interest in them," Mrs. Horton admitted. "I've had lots of young folks come and go from under my roof during the last twenty years and I like nothing better than to see them settled in life. I did think that Fannie and Henry Jordan would make a match of it, and I was glad, for he's a fine, steady boy making good money selling those fireproof filing cases, but he didn't show her the kind of attention her other friends do. Free lectures and the movies and now and then a good concert are about his limit, with maybe a little bunch of vi'lets or a pounda candy, while Fannie likes the Broadway shows and dancing where there's a cover charge. Not paying the bills, she don't know or stop to think of the price, and though Henry Jordan ain't stingy, he's the serious, quiet kind with a bank ac-

count and looking to the future. I guess he figgered she was too flyaway or maybe she got the notion that he was too slow; anyhow, a few weeks ago, they stopped going out together and was just frozen politeness and that's all. It ain't blowed over, and I've give 'em up!"

She poured herself another cup of tea resignedly and the new guest laughed again.

"Which are you running, a boarding-house or a matrimonial agency? I've often wondered! But the other one you spoke of, this Myrtle somebody; it seems to me I remember her. Big blonde, isn't she, with hands like a brakeman's?"

"She's a big, strong girl with yellow hair," Mrs. Horton amended defensively. "Myrtle plays piano in a continuous motion picture house uptown and I sh'd think that would make anybody's hands look like hams, thumping and banging eight-nine hours a day! She's kind of loud and flashy, but older, with a level head on her shoulders, and I never had a minute's worry about her. I did think she was kind of crazy 'bout Henry Jordan at first but he couldn't see her and she's too sensible to cry for the moon."

"I've got her now," Mrs. Moffat stemmed the garrulous flow with a nod. "Cold blue eye and circus clothes but she'll get on. . . . Hello, Simmy Darley! Did you come home early because you knew I was going to breeze in?"

The front door had opened and closed and a stoutish, slightly bald little man of fifty or thereabout paused on the threshold. He was attired in the extreme of

fashion as it is recognized along the Rialto. His waistcoat was resplendent, his spats the lightest tan and the soft felt hat of the same shade, which he held with his olive-wood stick in one hand, was of the most approved collegiate shape.

"Mrs. Moffat, this is a pleasure!" He advanced with hurried short steps and his voice squeaked cheerfully. "I needn't ask if you are well! How is trade out in Columbia this spring?"

"Rotten, thanks!" Mrs. Moffat returned as she gave him her hand. "That's why I'm here, for a new line to speed it up—ouch! Where did you get that Dempsey grip?"

"I told you Mr. Darley had been going to a gymnasium regular," Mrs. Horton remarked. "He was a real help moving furniture and hanging pictures for me after my spring cleaning."

"In all that magnificence!" With the frankness of old acquaintanceship Mrs. Moffat eyed him from top to toe and Simeon Darley's rotund face beamed with naïve complacency. "You look more like a bookmaker than a bookkeeper!"

"You always would have your joke!" he protested deprecatingly. "Just keeping up with the youngsters, Mrs. Moffat, that's the thing nowadays! If you'll spare me an evening soon I shall be delighted to have you and Mrs. Horton come with me to one of the new restaurants. The latest dance is a variation of the toddle——"

"Listen to the man!" she exclaimed. "Don't tell me it's got you, too, after all these years! I haven't toddled

since I learned to walk, and late suppers don't sharpen my eyes for job lots being put over on me!—How come?"

Mrs. Moffat added the question in a lowered tone after he had left the room and her companion shrugged.

"He just wants to show you what a real sport he's getting to be," she remarked comfortably. "There's no harm to Simmy, if there is mighty little else! He tried to take up with Fannie after her and Henry Jordan quit going together but she had him run ragged in a week, dancing till all hours, and then went back to her other friends.—Here's Fannie now."

A slim, small girl with fluffy brown hair framing a pretty, baby face had let herself in with her latchkey but paused at the foot of the stairs on hearing her name and then ran lightly in. Her black pleated frock and small moiré toque were the last word in smartness but a splashing lavallière of glassy stones glittered at her white throat and the hand she extended was covered with scintillating rings.

"Oh, how do!" There was a self-conscious note in her nervous little laugh. "You're late this season, aren't you, Mrs. Moffat? The styles have changed so, now that long skirts are in and bonnets instead of flats, that you'll find a lot of difference."

The older woman felt an impulse to draw in her feet, acutely conscious all at once of the brevity of her tweed traveling suit and the fact that her flat straw hat must be out-dated at least a month. The girl's appraising glance stung.

"Feingold's son came on for the earlier stock; I'm here for mid-summer's line and first fall," she replied abruptly, and then, ashamed of her own chagrin, she added: "That's a very smart little gown and bonnet of yours, my dear. Does Ruthven like you to wear so much jewelry to business, though?"

"Oh, didn't you know? I'm not with Ruthven any more, but with Louissette! Think of it, Mrs. Moffat, the most exclusive hat shop in town, and you ought to see the wonderful trade we have!" Fannie's china-blue eyes sparkled. "Of course I couldn't wear my rings and things there, I don't even dare put them on before I start for home but carry them in my purse; I have to dress in plain black like this, but it costs an awful lot for I couldn't be seen in wholesale things, only imported models. You won't find anything with these lines at places like Marx & Lefkowitz, and this little turban——!"

She paused, listening for a moment as a key grated again in the lock of the hall door and then shrugged at the step which sounded in the entrance, continuing in a slightly higher tone:

"As I was saying, Mrs. Moffat, if you want anything really swell you've got to pay for it; appearance is the whole thing in business and everything else.—Mrs. Horton, can I press out my cerise crêpe de chine? I've got a date to-night."

"All right, Fannie, but don't burn the board again, like a good girl." Then, in kindly solicitude: "Where're you going? That's a regular ball dress."

"Dance frock." Fannie tossed her fluffy, shining head. "I'm going with Mr. Rogers to a perfectly grand affair, mostly professionals, down at Brewster Hall.— See you at dinner, Mrs. Moffat."

She tripped humming out of the room and up the stairs, without a glance about her, although the footsteps had halted in the hall. Now they advanced once more and a young man appeared. Hazel-eyed, with a touch of red in his curly brown hair, and broad shoulders beneath the plain blue serge coat, his was a boyishly engaging figure as his homely, clean-cut features lighted with genuine pleasure at sight of the new arrival. The voice, too, in which he greeted her was buoyant with vigorous youth and his handclasp warm and firm.

"I'm glad to be back myself, Mr. Jordan," Mrs. Moffat replied to him. "You are still selling filing cases, Mrs. Horton tells me, and making a good thing of it."

"Just plodding along," Henry Jordan nodded. "We handle all kinds of steel office furniture now and we've had a great winter. What are you doing to-night? There's a dandy picture on at the International, and a fashion show added that you ought to see before you start out to-morrow. I'd like to take you and Mrs. Horton——?"

"Not me, Henry, I've got a sight of mending, but Mis' Moffat'll go with you. It was nice of you to think of it.—Heavens!" she rose precipitately. "Do you smell that? Sure as you're alive, Caroline's burnt the cake again! Mis' Moffat, you just make yourself com-

fortable, your room's ready any time you like——"

Her voice trailed back to them as she waddled off hastily toward the back stairs and Henry Jordan turned, laughing, to the door.

"Just the same as ever, isn't she? I don't know what any of us would do without Ma Horton!—You'll come to-night?"

"I'd love to, if you don't mind trotting a dowdy old woman around," Mrs. Moffat responded. "I feel quite smart back home but I'm nothing but a hoosier here. Little Miss Gillespie looked so stunning just now that I realized how hopelessly out of date I was."

She cast a friendly, quizzical glance at him and the young man flushed slightly but he met her eyes with steady candor.

"You look all right to me," he said briefly. "I guess there's a lot more foolish things than being a day or so behind the styles. We'll go as soon as dinner is over so as to get good seats, shall we?"

Later at the long table in Mrs. Horton's basement dining-room Mrs. Moffat encountered again the remaining member of the household, a loud-voiced young woman of Amazonian proportions with brassy golden hair elaborately waved and an air of sophisticated boredom. Myrtle Harris was a professional at last, she assured Mrs. Moffat, but it was a dawg's life and she didn't envy Paderewski or any of them other artists, knowing now what they was up against. It hadn't been half as hard when she was plugging hits in the sheet music department of Silkworth's Five & Ten, though, of course, nothing

like being a real performer in a theater. The Bronx Coliseum didn't get first runs but she supposed that wouldn't matter, Ohio houses not getting them either, and Mrs. Moffat must come some night and hear her play.

The entrance of Fannie Gillespie, radiant in a brilliant cerise gown which displayed far too much of her girlishly thin shoulders, put a temporary end to the conversational efforts of Myrtle Harris, and the latter stared and then sniffed. The lavallière had given place to a necklace of paste diamonds, which gleamed almost convincingly under the glare of the electric lights, and a ring with a single blazing stone, instead of the spreading cluster, adorned one of Fannie's small, animate hands.

Mrs. Moffat eyed it doubtfully and then with deepened gravity she studied the girl's pretty, doll-like face and listened to her high-pitched nervously gay chatter as the meal progressed. There seemed something forced and unnatural about her vivacity, as though she were under some strain or pressure. When her naïvely egotistical flow of small talk ceased for a moment she twitched and fidgeted, more than once glancing at the shaded area window as if she half expected to see a moving silhouette there. Was the girl afraid of some one? Surely there had been shrinking dread in that look, and in repose her soft lips drooped at the corners and the lids fluttered over the wide blue eyes.

Mrs. Moffat shrugged and turned to reply banteringly to a labored compliment of Simmy Darley's on her left. After all, Fannie was only one of the army of small-

town girls with more looks than brains and no great talent or ambition to keep her forging ahead to a definite goal. If she were the incorrigible flirt she seemed and anticipated some unpleasant scene or other now she would only be running true to type.

Henry Jordan devoted himself to his dinner with an appetite which argued well for his peace of mind and afterward, as he and the buyer from Ohio strolled toward Broadway in the soft dusk which still lingered before the late spring darkness fell, his companion studied him as she had the girl. Young people interested her and in her busy, successful life she had found time to make many of them her friends.

Quiet without being taciturn, light-hearted without boisterousness, he had attracted her on her former visits as much by his evident seriousness of purpose as by the uniform, thoughtful courtesy which seemed so inherently a part of him. It was safe to conjecture, Mrs. Moffat reflected, that he would never make a fool of himself over any little empty-headed flirt nor swerve, if that square jaw and steadfast gaze counted for anything, from the future he had planned.

The fashion exhibit posed before her on the screen absorbed her keenest professional attention, but the feature picture with its erotic star, anæmic male lead and hectic emotionalism seemed melodramatic and utterly silly. Mrs. Moffat was surprised to find her young host disposed to a serious discussion of it when, the performance over, they made their way to a soda fountain.

"Just a lemonade for me, please." She sighed at a rich chocolate concoction foaming from a near-by glass. "The girl was wonderful, of course, but didn't you think the story absurd? A plain, everyday sort of husband like that doesn't fly off at a tangent and commit murder simply because he has formed an ideal of his wife that she isn't capable of even comprehending, much less living up to."

Henry Jordan shook his head.

"I don't know. It didn't seem absurd to me," he remarked. "'Plain, everyday husbands' do that sort of thing every day, Mrs. Moffat, if you read the papers. The girl he thought she was never had lived and maybe he felt that the real one shouldn't, either, when he'd found out how heartless and wicked she was. Maybe he thought he had a right to kill her, same's he'd throttle a wild beast if he had nothing else to kill it with except his bare hands, to keep it from harming other people the way it had him."

Mrs. Moffat eyed him in amused astonishment.

"You think it was natural for him to get worked up to the pitch of killing like that, almost in a minute, a man who'd never before had the impulse to harm a fly? Do you believe such things happen in real life?"

"Yes, Mrs. Moffat, I do." His tone was still quietly, impersonally argumentative, yet it had deepened in gravity. "I believe there's apt to come a time in any man's life, no matter how harmless and soft-hearted he might be, when he'd like to kill somebody. Not just for his own satisfaction, I don't mean, but because he almost

thought he had a right, that it would be better if they were dead!"

Mrs. Moffat laughed outright.

"I shouldn't wonder if we'd all felt that way in the abstract, for a minute or two at a time, maybe, but not seriously; not with the actual idea of murder! Thank goodness, life isn't quite like what the movies would have us believe."

Henry Jordan frowned thoughtfully for a moment and then laughed too.

"I guess it is a good thing," he conceded. "Will you have another lemonade?"

Mrs. Moffat declined and they walked the few blocks to the boarding-house in comparative silence, past the glitter of lights on the great thoroughfare into the dim, shadowed side-street where the faint glimmer of the stars worked eerie magic on commonplace stone and brick and mortar.

The buyer would have a big day before her and long habit had accustomed her healthy faculties to obey her will, but to-night for some reason she could not readily compose herself to sleep. It must be the long, nerve-racking hours on the train, she told herself wearily, or the thought of to-morrow's ever-recurring problem; the right choice at the right price, and not to be stung with a line of false alarms as Feingold's son had been. . . .

The door downstairs opened and closed, and a not-too-light feminine footstep accompanied by a whiff of reeking scent under her own door announced the return of Myrtle Harris. Then long intervals passed, punctuated

by slow strokes from a distant church clock, and still sleep would not come to Mrs. Moffat.

Midnight, then one, and then two. . . . Was that the front door again? The sound had been so soft that the involuntary listener could not be sure, but in another moment the faintest of steps crept past her door and on up the stairs and from a discreet distance down the block there came the diminishing whirr of a taxi.

Fannie Gillespie, of course! She had youth and health but taxis at two in the morning didn't mean efficiency a few hours later; she wouldn't hold her job down long with Louisette or any one else, for that matter, if she kept up this pace, innocent enough though it might be in fact.

Yet what did the Fannies of this world matter to a busy woman with her own problems to face? In disgust with herself, Mrs. Moffat rose and throwing on a robe crossed to her open window and dropped into a low chair. The street was deserted, the infrequent lamps glowing through an orange haze beneath the cold, steely light of the stars and only the occasional rumble of a belated truck breaking the silence.

Yet was the street quite deserted? Wasn't that a moving shadow opposite in the deeper gloom of the area-way? Mrs. Moffat leaned a trifle forward and watched for long minutes, but if some one were lurking there he did not betray his presence again. With a little shrug of impatience she returned to her bed at last.

Nerves, after all these years! Could it be that silly picture? Far-fetched as it was, it had impressed that

intensely serious young man, Henry Jordan. What was it he had said about the murderer? Something about his right to kill the woman who had first killed his own ideals and illusions? Youth stuff, of course, but still. . . .

Trying dimly to recall his exact words, Mrs. Moffat fell asleep at last.

CHAPTER II

CHOCOLATES AND CONFIDENCES

THE next two days were busy ones for the buyer for Feingold & Son, and she saw little of her fellow lodgers at Mrs. Horton's beyond a hurried greeting at mealtime; they were successful days, but strenuous, and, utterly fatigued late one afternoon, she paused in the lower hall before ascending the stairs just as Fannie Gillespie entered behind her.

The girl seemed pale beneath the light flecks of rouge she had acquired since Mrs. Moffat's last trip to the city, and there were faint bluish shadows about her big, childish eyes. The little droop remained at the corners of her lips even as she smiled waveringly in response to the older woman's nod.

"It's been an awful long day, hasn't it?" There was a flat, dispirited note in the usually high-pitched young voice. "I do get so tired everlastingly trying perfect dreams of hats on the homeliest,rossest people! You ought to see the cars they come in, Mrs. Moffat, and their clothes—oh, and their jewels! I never thought there were so many diamonds in the world as I've seen since I went to work for Louissette! It's funny how some girls that aren't a bit attractive have everything, isn't it?"

"Well, they haven't—attraction." Mrs. Moffat smiled and added on an impulse, "Won't you stop in my room for a minute on your way up? I have a marvelous box of chocolates that Marx & Lefkowitz sent me and of course I mustn't touch one of them; I'd like to get temptation out of my way."

"May I?" The discontented face brightened. "I suppose you've been ordering heaps of things? I'd like to be able to go out and buy everything I thought was pretty!"

"Even if the pretty things were to be worn by somebody else?" Her companion led the way upstairs and into the pleasant front room on the second floor. "Sit down and take off your hat if you like. Here is your candy."

She placed a huge, beribboned box in Fannie's hands and motioned toward a chair, seating herself with a sigh in the low rocker.

"Oh, they're lovely! Won't you take even one?" The girl drew off her slightly worn gloves, displaying again the bunched rings among which the single large stone gleamed like a headlight, and fell to munching the chocolates avidly. "I—I don't eat lunch very often now. It does cost so terribly to dress the way Eileen Gaffney and the other salesladies at Louissette's do, and then I have to have so many things to go out in. No fellow wants to take a girl out unless he can be proud of her, and if you're dowdy you don't get anywhere!"

"Is it worth it?" Mrs. Moffat asked quietly. "Going hungry, I mean, just to dress to please other people and

have good times that tire you all out so you can't put your best effort into your work and get on? What's the use of it?"

"Why-y!" The blue eyes opened wide. "What would be the good of working at all except so that you could have the good times? I like to have the boys I go out with proud to be seen with me, and I know some dandy fellows who think nothing's too good for their girl! I've been to the swellest parties lately and I don't mind being tired. I don't see any use in just working and working without a bit of fun; it'll be years and years before I'll get old enough to be a manager or buyer and by that time I won't want to dance or care about theaters and the beaches."

"And you may not be qualified for a manager's or buyer's job if you don't work for it," Mrs. Moffat reminded her gently. "I suppose, though, you are figuring on marriage, as most girls do?"

Fannie shrugged.

"The fellows who want to get married only think of sticking you in a horrid little flat uptown or a cottage in the suburbs somewhere, to do your own work and be lonesome all day and never have any real fun, just put every cent in the bank!" She made a little moué. "Those that take you around can't afford to get married, but I'm not thinking of that, anyway, for ages yet. I'm having too good a time! The beaches are going to be grand this summer! I've got a friend who has a concession at the new one, Knickerbocker Park, that's simply thrilling; it's called the Avalanche Ride."

Mrs. Moffat shook her head at the hopelessness of further argument.

"I didn't know the beaches were open so early," she observed absently.

"Oh, yes! I found this in the sand last Sunday; wouldn't you think it was real?" She thrust out the finger upon which the single stone glistened. "First time I ever found anything pretty; I'm not lucky that way. You never saw anything so lovely, though, as the rings our customers wear—gracious! Is it as late as that?"

Her eyes had fallen on the traveling clock on Mrs. Moffat's dresser and she jumped up closing the depleted box reluctantly.

"Take it with you to your own room, my dear." Mrs. Moffat's glance had followed the gesture. "Are you going out again to-night?"

"Yes, but only for a little while, with a boy I don't care so much for any more. He's an auto race driver and he leaves for Detroit on the midnight.—Oh, did you know there's a new boarder? He's dark and awfully good-looking, and his clothes look as if they were made to order. I saw him last night when he came to make arrangements. I don't suppose he can be much of a sport or he wouldn't want to live in a quiet place like this, but he looked different, somehow."

"Not like Henry Jordan?" Mrs. Moffat lifted her eyebrows.

"Mercy, no. Henry's a dear and I used to be crazy about him, but he's the dreadful, serious kind I told you about and doesn't know what it is to really have a good

time.—I must hurry and change my dress. Thanks for the lovely chocolates!”

She closed the door, nodding brightly, and hurried up to the top floor and her tiny hall room in the rear, while Mrs. Moffat rearranged her hair reflectively. Fannie Gillespie had changed in the few months since last she had seen her; then everything had been wonderful and the simplest pleasures were delights, although already the love for the spurious finery within her reach had made itself manifest. Now she was growing disillusioned, wearying of the simpler things, choosing her companions solely for their ability to spend money prodigally. Race drivers, concessionaires at amusement parks, “sports”—where would it all lead?

It was in vain that the older woman told herself it was nothing to her; the girl’s piquant prettiness and innate candor and honesty as well as her very human longing for what she considered happiness had made their own appeal. What bitterness of further disillusionment would the next interval bring before they met again?

Mrs. Moffat was late for dinner and the others had all gathered about the long table when she made her appearance. Among them was a new face and she recalled what the girl had said about an addition to the household.

Mrs. Horton presented him beamingly as Mr. Edgar North, and the young man rose and bowed politely with a quick flash of his bright, dark eyes. The hand resting on the back of his chair was long and slender but not too obviously manicured, and his voice was pleasantly modulated as he acknowledged the introduction and then slipped

into his chair with a graceful litheness of movement that suggested strength and control.

He was a bond salesman, it developed, recently sent up to the New York branch of a New Orleans house and his accent held the soft, rolling slur of the South in his slow, not too loquacious speech.

Myrtle Harris leaned both elbows on the table, ignoring her veal pot pie, as she described the difficulties of an artiste's career to the engaging stranger and Fannie, who had put on a filmy blue gown the color of her eyes and long paste earrings that pulled at her small pink lobes, hung with flattering attention on his infrequent observations. But if Mr. North was aware of the personal element he gave no sign, directing his conversation in the main to the landlady with an unaffected deference which delighted that honest soul.

"You dance, of course?" Fannie asked when Myrtle paused for breath.

The newcomer darted a swift glance at her in which she read an eager response, but he only replied quietly:

"I was raised to it, Miss Gillespie, though not, I'm afraid, the kind of dancing you do up No'th. I must try to learn, of co'se, when I have time."

Myrtle laughed loudly.

"You don't sell bonds in the evenings, do you?"

"Hardly, Miss Harris, but I've planned to study and attend some lectures at one of the colleges heah." He smiled, showing a flash of white teeth in his dark, smooth-shaven face, and turned to Mrs. Horton. "I'm afraid I shall burn your lights ve'y late some nights, ma'am."

"Go right ahead!" Mrs. Horton responded cordially. "I like to see my young people improving themselves. My late husband was a great reader, though the sporting extras never done him much good, for he usually picked the wrong one. He could talk real well when I had time to listen to him and he got it all from magazines the folks left laying around. I always believe in education. What line are you thinking of taking up?"

"Finance and economics." It seemed to Mrs. Moffat that there was a hint of amusement in North's tone. "Can you tell me, suh, which of the colleges offer evening lectures?"

He had addressed Simmy Darley and, while the latter hurriedly disclaimed any knowledge of the city's higher educational advantages, Fannie pushed away her saucer of rice pudding and rose with an annoyed swish of silk and tinkle of earrings to leave the room. Inadvertently, Mrs. Moffat glanced at Henry Jordan and was surprised at the look of pain in his eyes as they followed the slender, departing figure. Was he thinking again of a certain lost illusion of his own? It couldn't have been an overwhelming one or he would scarcely have remained under the same roof and in constant daily association with the girl who "used to be crazy about him," but it seemed evident that he was not yet wholly cured.

Mrs. Moffat spent the evening in her room casting up accounts and preparing a lengthy report for Feingold & Son and she was so deeply preoccupied with the latter that she was only subconsciously aware of the thud of the vestibule door. She glanced at the clock, noting idly

that it was just half-past ten, and returned to her report once more when a muffled sob in the hallway made her turn in surprise, then rise and open the door.

"Is that you, Miss Gillespie? Is anything the matter, my dear? Can I help?"

The little figure muffled in the soft blue cape halted at the foot of the second flight of stairs and then turned and came slowly toward her.

"It's nothing, Mrs. Moffat, only I think men are horrid! I've had a perfectly awful time and it wasn't a bit my fault!"

As she came into the room, closing the door behind her, the older woman saw that the tears which stood in the round eyes were those of anger rather than sorrow and her lips were crimson as though she had set her small teeth in them.

"What happened? Tell me if you like. Did you go out with the friend you spoke of this afternoon?"

Fannie nodded and slipped the cape from her shoulders as she dropped into a chair.

"Yes, but I only went to be nice to him because he begged so; I told you I didn't care for him any more." She pressed her hands to her flushed cheeks. "He was awfully good fun at first to run around with, and I liked it when we'd go in a restaurant just after he'd won some big race and people would whisper and stare. But he—he got to thinking everything was settled between us as soon as he gave up the road and opened a garage, and then he began quarreling about everything, my jewelry and my other friends and even the way I happened to

look at people! We had one last row and I didn't see him for ever so long until just lately; but I wouldn't make up with him again the way he wanted me to, and I only went out with him for a dance to-night because he was going away. And then he had to make a perfectly dreadful scene!"

"Why?" Mrs. Moffat asked quietly.

"Just because Jack Rogers joined us and I danced with him—well, quite a little. He's simply elegant! But you must have seen him lots of times on the screen. Frank heard I'd been going around with him and all of a sudden he got in a terrible rage and—and wanted to fight him! Jack's the perfect gentleman, though, and he went right away and I came home all by myself. It was horrid of Frank—as if he had the right!"

She twisted her handkerchief nervously between her fingers and Mrs. Moffat recalled the odd tension in the girl's manner on the night of her own arrival.

"Are you afraid of this Frank?" she paused and added: "Has he ever threatened you?"

"Oh, no!" Fannie replied quickly as she rose, gathering her cape about her once more. Her eyes had darted toward the door with a curious fluttering of their lids, however, and she drew a hasty breath. "What could he do except make nasty scenes like to-night? I was so ashamed! Fellows say crazy, silly things about what they'll do when you won't bother with them any more, but they don't ever do anything, really. I guess I'll go to bed, for there's going to be a wonderful party to-morrow night and I'll hardly have a wink of sleep before

I'll be due at the shop again! I wish there wasn't anything but good times, ever!"

When she had gone on up the stairs, Mrs. Moffat returned to her task, but she found it impossible to concentrate on Poiret twills and tricotines, marvellas and duvetyn. The pretty, shallow young thing who had just left her was dominated by a serious emotion at last, and that emotion was fear! Of whom or what was she afraid? The unhappy scene of that evening which she had so naïvely recounted had meant only a "horrid" quarter of an hour to her, nothing more, yet at the first suggestion that she might have been threatened, Fannie had betrayed her apprehension even as she quickly—too quickly—denied it and then retreated precipitately. If the girl were in any actual trouble——?

She decided to have a frank but tactful talk with her on the morrow and learn what advice or help she might offer and in the meantime the report for Feingold & Son must be put through. Forcing the problem of her young fellow-lodger resolutely from her thoughts, Mrs. Moffat wrote for an hour with her accustomed conciseness and exactitude and then retired to sleep soundly until Agnes knocked upon her door.

"Ha' past seven, Mis' Moffat." To her still drowsy perceptions it seemed that there was an odd quaver in the usually thin, sharp tones. "Will you dress real quick, please, ma'am?"

"What's the matter?" Thoroughly awake on the instant, Mrs. Moffat rose and threw her robe about her. "Is anything wrong, Agnes?"

“I don’t know. I’m afraid so.” The voice quavered still more and Mrs. Moffat opened the door to find Agnes wringing her hands, with her apron askew and her wisps of hair standing out in greater disorder than ever. “It’s Miss Fannie! I’ve knocked and hollered till I’m hoarse, but there isn’t any answer and Mis’ Horton told me to—to fetch a policeman!”

CHAPTER III

BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR

“ ‘A POLICEMAN!’ ” repeated Mrs. Moffat, aghast. “What in the world for?”

“To—to break the door down!” Agnes whispered with a fearful glance over her shoulder up the well of the staircase. “It’s locked from the inside and the key’s still in the hole! Mis’ Horton says the police have got to be here in case anything terrible should’ve happened. Deary me, in all the years——! Hear her now, ma’am! I thought maybe you’d go up to her before she gets a stroke or something!”

“I will, at once, Agnes!” Mrs. Moffat had paused to listen to the subdued pounding and frightened entreaties in the landlady’s usually placid tones and now she started to close her door. “I’ll just get into a few things and you’d better call the officer without rousing the rest of the house.”

“They’re all up, only Miss Myrtle’s in hysterics and the cook ain’t much better!” Agnes turned to descend the stairs. “You’ll hurry, ma’am?”

Waiting only to pin up her heavy braid, thrust her feet into slippers, and put on a more substantial garment than the light bathrobe, Mrs. Moffat hurried up the stairs with her heart beating suffocatingly and a nameless fear clutching at her throat.

The girl must be there! She couldn't have gone out again, and besides, there was the door locked from inside! Why didn't she answer?

From behind a closed door on the third floor there came the strangling sobs of Myrtle Harris' noisy hysteria, and a heavy tread and hoarse breathing in Simeon Darley's room showed that the alarm had been conveyed to the middle-aged bookkeeper, but Mrs. Moffat was scarcely conscious of the sounds that reached her ears. She knew only that the thumping and calling from above had ceased and that her feet seemed weighed with lead so that she could hardly drag them along, yet in reality she was all but flying along the hall to the next flight of stairs.

At their foot she drew back for an instant as the door of the front hall bedroom opened abruptly and the new boarder, Edgar North, confronted her, fully dressed.

"I beg your pardon, but isn't there some trouble?" he asked quietly, his dark eyes searching hers with evident concern. "I'll be ve'y glad to be of any assistance——?"

"I'm not sure," Mrs. Moffat stammered, and then drew herself together. "Miss Gillespie can't be waked and Mrs. Horton is afraid she is ill. I am going up to see."

She started up the last flight, discovering the landlady sitting huddled on the topmost step and Henry Jordan, coatless and collarless, leaning against the balustrade on the landing just over her head, his face haggard and gray in the cold, searching light.

"Oh, Mis' Moffat!" Mrs. Horton moaned, holding out her fat, trembling hands. "I've called and called, but Fannie don't seem to hear! Henry Jordan's almost kicked the panels through and he wanted to break the door down for me, himself, only I wouldn't let him! I know she come in all right, for I saw the light from under her door long after eleven, when I took a last look through the house before I went to bed, the same as I always do. She'd have come to me if she felt sick, or anything. You don't think that she's—she's——!"

"I don't know what to think, Mrs. Horton, but you'll just have to pull yourself together. We'll know soon what has happened." Mrs. Moffat held the cold, shaking hands in a firm grip and glanced up at the young man, surprised to find that her own voice was in such steady control once more. "You haven't heard the slightest sound from Miss Gillespie?"

He shook his head speechlessly and then another voice sounded from just behind and below her.

"I don't like to intrude, being such a stranger, but is there any way I could be of service, Mrs. Horton?"

"Heavens, it's Mr. North! I'd forgotten all about you!" the landlady exclaimed. "Maybe we're only making a fuss over nothing, but Miss Gillespie——!"

Words failed her but Edgar North nodded.

"I know; Mrs. Moffat told me. You said something a minute ago about breaking the door down—perhaps Mr. Jordan and I could fo'ce it——?"

"Thanks, North, but Mrs. Horton thinks we'd better wait for the police." Henry Jordan found his voice, but

it was strained and unnatural, and he spoke with what was evidently a tremendous effort. "They'd have to be notified anyway, if there's anything desperately wrong!"

"To be sure," the young Southerner agreed in a low, shocked tone. "Is there a doctor on this street? If Miss Gillespie has met with some accident during the night——?"

"Of course! Why didn't I think of that?" Mrs. Horton cried. "Doctor Vaughn lives just four doors away on the opposite side and I'll be ever so much obliged if you'll run over and bring him here. Do bang on the door again, Henry! Maybe she's come to and can hear us now!"

The other young man had turned and was running down the stairs as Henry moved obediently toward the door at the rear of the hall which faced them with a blankness that seemed portentous in its silent menace. Mrs. Moffat noted his reluctant hesitation before he lifted his hand to knock, but the gesture was never finished, for at that moment a heavy door slammed far below and an elephantine tread resounded through the house as some one dashed up the stairs.

Mrs. Horton rose and the two women instinctively drew together while Henry turned and took up his former position at the rail. Feet pounded along the hall just beneath, Myrtle Harris opened her door, screamed shrilly and closed it again, and the next instant a burly bluecoat appeared and ascended three steps at a time.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Horton?" he demanded. "Your

Agnes says there's a girl here, one of your boarders, that you can't get any answer from. Which door is it?"

Silently Mrs. Horton pointed and the policeman advanced.

"Keep back, all of you! Not a single one crosses that sill till I say the word!—Now then!"

There came a mighty thud and straining creak as his massive shoulder drove at the panel, but the stout lock held and it was only after a second and third onslaught that it gave way with a crash and the door burst inward, carrying him with it before he could brace himself.

The shades had been pulled down and the darkness from within seemed to rush appallingly out upon them; and the jarring vibration echoed in the shuddering silence and died away while they waited, breathless and tense. Then, just when it seemed that the ultimate moment of endurance had come, a smothered exclamation reached their ears.

"Holy Saints! She's done the Dutch!"

Everything whirled before Mrs. Moffat's vision, yet through it she still seemed to see clearly the expression of hopeless horror upon Henry Jordan's face; but Mrs. Horton uttered a choking cry and collapsed at her feet, a quivering mound of flesh, as though she had been stricken by a blow.

The next few minutes passed in a kaleidoscopic jumble of hideous, confused impressions. She was aware that Simeon Darley passed her bellowing inarticulately, with the tail of his dressing-gown streaking out behind him; that the young man from New Orleans had reap-

peared with a bearded stranger carrying a small black bag; and that somehow Agnes was beside her, bending over the unconscious figure of the landlady, wailing thinly and wringing her hands while the sound of feminine weeping from below seemed to have been augmented into a chorus.

Then the stentorian voice of the bluecoat brought a semblance of order.

"Now then, get back there! No one lay a finger on the body till the medical examiner——! Oh, 'tis you, Doctor! Come this way, please! The rest of you clear out; clear this hall and the stairs, but see that not a one of you leaves this house!"

Mrs. Moffat rose, swaying, from where she had dropped to her knees beside the landlady, and in spite of herself her eyes turned with awful fascination to the broken door and the shadowy semi-darkness that lay beyond. The wooden furnishings showed merely in vague outline but the bed had evidently been relegated from one of the more elaborately appointed rooms downstairs when its style went out of fashion, for it was of brass with square-cut posts reaching almost to the ceiling from its towering headboard. To Mrs. Moffat's dazed, fearful vision it seemed that from one of these something swung in mid-air—something slim and white and unnaturally tall that loomed like a specter, and involuntarily she took a trembling step forward.

The next moment a hand fell heavily on her shoulder and the same loud, authoritative tone admonished:

"Keep back, lady! Get on downstairs and take Mrs.

Horton with you.—Doctor, don't let a one of them in there till I go telephone to the station."

Henry and the new young man between them were lifting the landlady's flaccid bulk and Mrs. Moffat followed slowly with Agnes down the two flights of stairs to Mrs. Horton's own rear hall bedroom on the second floor. Myrtle Harris' hysteria had subsided to heaving sobs as they passed her door, but below they came upon Caroline, the cook, crouched at the foot of the stairs, rocking herself back and forth in a paroxysm of woe.

"Whut was it, Mistuh Burke?" she had gathered her wits together to demand of the policeman as he descended in advance of the others. "Whut done got po' Miss Fan? Lordy, lordy! Fust time you was evah in dis yere house 'ceptin' fo' a tas'e o' mah cookin'——!"

"Lemme get by, Caroline, and hush up that noise!" he responded gruffly. "You better 'tend to Mrs. Horton——."

The landlady opened her eyes as they laid her upon her bed and glanced shrinkingly about. Then her gaze fastened on Mrs. Moffat's tense face.

"Fannie! What—what happened to her!" she whispered. "She isn't——? She can't be——?"

Mrs. Moffat shook her head.

"I didn't see, but the officer said she was dead. At least he gave orders that no one was to go near the body and he has notified some one over the telephone. That is all I know." She turned as Simeon Darley appeared in the doorway. "Did you go into that room?"

"Yes.—God, it's frightful! Why did the poor child

do it?" His voice was low and shaken and the flesh sagged in grayish folds from his jaw as though his round face had been suddenly deflated. "It's—it's like a nightmare! What could have driven her to——!"

"To what!" Mrs. Horton sat bolt upright. "What are you trying to say, Mr. Darley? Fannie didn't——!"

"She's hung herself!" He drew a handkerchief from the pocket of his dressing-gown and mopped his face. "You never saw anything so horrible! She's hanging there to the bedpost with the chair kicked away from under her——!"

Agnes screamed and covered her face with her hands and Mrs. Horton moaned, but Henry Jordan stood rigidly staring straight before him with unseeing eyes. Mrs. Moffat glanced at Edgar North and he nodded gravely.

"Mr. Jordan and I saw her, too. It's—a terrible thing! I don't know about the fo'malities of the law up No'th, but if there is anything I can do for any of you ladies, for Mrs. Horton——?" He paused and although his face had paled his tones were steady.

"I don't think so, but you might ask the doctor to look in on Miss Harris on his way down," Mrs. Moffat suggested mechanically. "Agnes, I'll see to Mrs. Horton now. Get the cook quieted and back to her kitchen; everybody's got to have some coffee, whether they want it or not, to brace up and go through with this dreadful business. I suppose a crowd will begin to collect pretty soon if the policeman was seen to come in here and then the doctor——."

"I'll put on my collar and coat, and North and I can go down and keep them away from the vestibule," offered Henry Jordan, passing his hand across his forehead. Mrs. Moffat saw that it came down glistening with moisture, and his voice sounded now like that of a man roused with difficulty from a dream. "I suppose they won't let us do anything—upstairs."

He stumbled from the room in the wake of Edgar North, who had preceded him, and Simeon Darley asked helplessly:

"What can I do after I phone to the office? God, I never had such a shock! To think how bright and happy she seemed at dinner last night and then to find her dead, hanging like that!"

"For heaven's sake!" Mrs. Horton moaned, covering both ears with her hands. "If you say anything more you'll drive me crazy! Something musta happened when she went out last night, but why in the world didn't she come to me and tell me? Fannie was a dear, good girl and she mighta known there was nothing she couldn't talk to me about! It's wonderful you can keep so ca'm, Mis' Moffat! I'm thankful you're here to help me, though it's terr'ble for you to get mixed up in this! Poor girl! Poor girl!"

The tears were coursing down her cheeks and she wiped them away with the end of the pillowcase as Officer Burke paused on the threshold.

"Come on, Darley, I'll need you till a couple of the boys get over here from the station-house. I don't want anybody let up that top flight of stairs."

The importance of his mission filling him with sudden composure, Darley gathered his robe about him and departed; and as Mrs. Horton rose and tottered to her dresser, still weeping, her companion proceeded to her own room. There, while she dressed hastily and rearranged her hair, the hideous, unbelievable fact kept pounding into her brain; Fannie Gillespie had hanged herself! The slim, white, wraith-like thing which had appeared to float there in the semi-darkness of the room had been her body, dangling from the bedpost! The girl whose last words had voiced the wish that there wouldn't be "anything but good times, ever!" was dead, thrust into the Unknown by the act of her own hand!

It wasn't true, it couldn't be! Even as she forced the truth with monotonous reiteration upon her consciousness, Mrs. Moffat found herself rebelling, refusing to accept it. Fannie's nervous, apprehensive manner, her evasion of the pointblank question as to whether or not the man she called "Frank" had threatened her, and the very words of her reply: "Fellows say crazy, silly things about what they'll do when you won't bother with them any more but they don't do anything, really"—all these returned to Mrs. Moffat's mind, but they offered no adequate explanation of the girl's suicide. She had feared a quarrel, a distasteful scene such as had actually taken place on the previous evening, perhaps, but surely nothing more, surely nothing could have threatened her which left only the dread alternative of self-destruction!

Yet she must have had some reason for that sudden, desperate impulse! Did Henry Jordan suspect what it

could be? He had borne the shock of the discovery with remarkable composure, even for one of his quiet, self-contained temperament, considering the fact, that, up to a few short weeks before, he had appeared to be deeply attached to the girl. His face had expressed horror, pain, shrinking revulsion, but not an overwhelming surprise. Could he conceive some motive for Fannie's mad act which had been hidden from her other associates, even from the motherly but not too discerning eyes of Mrs. Horton?

A car drove up to the curb and stopped, and heavy footsteps passed along the hall, accompanied by the low mutter of masculine voices, before she finished dressing, and when Agnes appeared at the door Mrs. Moffat was not unprepared for her announcement:

"The police doctor's come with another man, and there's more policemen in the vestibule and on the sidewalk keeping the crowd back. Do you hear them?"

Mrs. Moffat had indeed been subconsciously aware of an increasing babel of sound from below and the shuffle and tramp of many feet on the pavement, but she had given it no heed in the turmoil of her thoughts. Now she stepped to the window and lifted the shade which flapped over the open lower sash. A small mob was eddying about the cleared semi-circle held by several blue-coats before the old-fashioned high stoop; delivery boys and children on their way to school formed the inner ring and the morbidly curious of the neighborhood were clustered in the background, while knots of people had filled the doorways and opened windows across the street.

From either avenue were coming others in a continuous stream attracted by the crowd already gathered and the sight of the police car drawn up at the curb. Mrs. Moffat hastily dropped the shade and turned away from the window.

"Mrs. Horton says will you please come down to the dining-room for your coffee?" Agnes inquired. "Mr. Jordan's took Mr. Darley's place upstairs. Ain't it terrible about poor Miss Fannie? I don't know what they're going to do with her, but I heard the police doctor say something about a autopsy!"

"I suppose that's the usual thing." Mrs. Moffat repressed a shudder. "Tell Mrs. Horton I'll be right down."

In passing she glanced at the chair beside the table. There only a few short hours before Fannie Gillespie had been sitting, her soft blue cape like a cloud about her and the paste diamonds glistening bravely as they swayed pendant from her small ears. She had been looking forward to a "big party" to-night and earlier she had remarked with the liveliest anticipation that the beaches "were going to be great this summer." Was that the mental attitude of a girl who contemplated death, who secretly faced a problem to which she could find only the most tragic of solutions?

In the meantime Mrs. Horton, having dressed and stemmed her tears, had summoned Henry Jordan from his self-imposed duty in the vestibule and coaxed him to swallow a cup of steaming coffee, after which Officer Burke had ordered him to stand sentry for Simeon

Darley on the top floor and he passed the latter on the last flight of stairs.

"It's—it's hell, Henry!" The rotund figure seemed to have shrunken beneath the dressing-gown and the stubby hands worked convulsively. "A shutter or something is banging in there as though her heels were drumming against the wall, and I could have sworn I heard something like a groan. It's a downright shame to leave her that way! Don't go near the door again, my boy, it'll break you all up!"

But when his footsteps had died away in the echoing well of the staircase, Henry Jordan, after a swift glance about him, had gone straight to the yawning aperture at the end of the hall where the shattered door swung on its twisted hinges and, reaching in, drawn it toward him. The key was still in the burst lock, its bit protruding almost to the ward from the outer side of the keyhole. Henry bent and studied it, then with a second quick glance behind him he whipped out his handkerchief, wrapped it carefully around his hand, and reaching behind the edge of the door withdrew the key.

Retreating to the center of the hall where the sunshine came down in a pallid streak through the skylight he held the key by the bow and examined the lock end with puzzled attention while a slight frown gathered on his forehead, but a sound from below roused him with a start and he hurried back to the door. When he had replaced the key he pushed the door so that it swayed back to its former position and then, as he turned, his gaze fell for the last time on the vague outline of the pathetically

small, inert form suspended in the gloom within, and a groan forced its way between his set teeth.

When Burke ascended the stairs a moment later with the assistant medical examiner and another behind him, he found his deputy standing motionless beneath the skylight, his hands gripping the balustrade and his head bowed so that a deep, obliterating shadow fell across his face.

CHAPTER IV

STEVENSON FROM HEADQUARTERS

“**W**HO was Fannie Gillespie? Where did she come from? Do you know the names and addresses of any of her relatives?” The assistant medical examiner, a portentously grave young man with a high, bulging forehead and stiff, upstanding yellow hair like a brush above it, peered owlshly through his large-rimmed glasses as he sat beside the center table in the parlor and shot his questions at the still dazed landlady.

“Her full name is Francis May Gillespie and she came from up-state; from Bison, New York,” Mrs. Horton replied in a tone that still trembled. “Her parents are dead, and I don’t know—seems to me I did hear her speak of a brother, but I can’t recall that she mentioned his name or where he lived.”

“How long has she boarded here?”

“She come to me a year ago last March; that’ll be nearly fourteen months. Fannie hadn’t been away from home long then. She’d been boarding with the aunt of a girl who worked in the same place as her, Ruthven’s wholesale millinery, it was.”

“She was employed there until the present time?”

“No, she’s with Louissette now, I mean——” Mrs.

Horton caught herself up with a shudder of remembrance. "I mean she was there yesterday."

The doctor nodded unconcernedly.

"How old was she?"

"Just twenty-one. She had a birthday on the twentieth of last month and Caroline baked her a cake . . ."

"'Just twenty-one.'" The doctor made a brief note. "Do you know if she was engaged to be married?"

"Oh, no! Fannie's a real popular girl—I mean, she was—and she had lots of gentlemen friends who took her out, but I never heard of her promising to marry any of 'em. She—she wasn't thinking of settling down yet; all she cared about was just having a good time." Mrs. Horton paused and then added hastily: "Don't make any mistake, though! Fannie was a thoroughly good girl and brought up careful, as anybody that knew her could tell. It was natural for her to like finery and she copied the rich customers at the store as close as she could, but all her jewelry was only fake that she bought herself and she'd do without 'most anything for a pretty dress."

"Who were these gentlemen friends? What are their names and where did they work? Did you meet them?"

Mrs. Horton shook her head at the broadside of queries.

"I don't know. Fannie talked about them, of course, but I don't recall their names except three; I never met any of them when they called to take her out, for I don't hang around and poke my nose in my boarders' business. Let me see—she spoke of an auto racer named Frank Ward, and Mr. Jack Rogers, a motion picture actor, and

there was a Ben Newell, who was a new friend. He runs some kind of a scenic railway thing at one of the parks. Fannie knew the auto racer longer, I think."

"Who was her most intimate friend?"

"A girl that works with her at Louissette's, Eileen Gaffney. She's been here two—three times on Sundays, a real pretty, stylish, lively girl, and I know they went out together often. I wouldn't have called them specially intimate, though; Fannie'd tell you everything she knew straight off if she liked you. She was that kind."

Tears welled up once more in the kindly eyes and the doctor frowned, asking hastily:

"Do you know of any reason for the girl's suicide? Has she appeared to be in any trouble or difficulty?—Low-spirited? Has she asked about any letters or telephone calls that didn't come?"

There was a third person present; the man who had arrived with the assistant medical examiner. Throughout the interview he had stood quietly by the window seemingly intent on surveying the crowd outside through the thick, coarse lace curtains, but now he turned sharply, a stocky, thick-set figure with sandy hair and a shrewd, genial twinkle in his brown eyes.

"No, she was the happiest little thing alive!" Mrs. Horton asserted. "She always asked who'd called her up and what letters had come for her, but she didn't seem anxious about any particular one, and she didn't know what low spirits was! Ever since Mr. Burke broke the door down for me and found what—what she'd done I've been asking myself why, *why*, till I'm 'most crazy!

That's the only thing could have happened to her; that she went out of her mind, and yet there never was a saner, more clear-headed girl, for all her foolishness about clothes and fun. She got nice money at Louissette's, didn't go in any debt that I ever heard of, and hadn't any serious love affair; there ain't a reason in the world why she should think of dying, much less making away with herself!"

The doctor glanced at his companion and rose.

"Then you don't know of anyone to notify about her death?"

"Not unless you can locate some Gillespies in Bison. If you mean about the funeral expenses I guess I can take care of them; Fannie's been most like one of my own family and I couldn't think of her laying in any charity grave. I s'pose you'll—you'll have to take her away for an autopsy?"

The doctor nodded.

"We'll let you know when an undertaker can send for the body if no one claims it. I'll arrange to take it away at once."

He turned to the door and the other man joined him. Mrs. Horton rose, but they paid no attention to her, talking together for a moment in a quick undertone. Then the assistant medical examiner departed and his companion closed the door and came briskly back to her.

"Sit down again, please, Mrs. Horton. This is a pretty sad thing to have happen in your house and of course you are as anxious as we are to find out what motive the girl had for killing herself," he began in a

sympathetically confidential tone. "Let's see if we can't get at some reason you haven't thought of yet. You say she was the kind of a girl to give her confidence to anybody if she liked them, but there might have been something in her life that she didn't talk about, something that happened before she ever came here. You remembered that she spoke of a brother even though you couldn't recall his name; can you think what she said about him, how she happened to mention him at all?"

"Mrs. Horton's wet eyes clouded as she turned them upon him.

"I don't know as I ought to talk about her family, and there isn't anything much that I could say. Of course you come with the police doctor, but——?"

He smiled reassuringly.

"That's all right. I'm Stevenson, from Headquarters, and we're only interested in family gossip in order to get a line on the girl herself. What did she tell you about this brother of hers?"

"I couldn't say in so many words, Mr. Stevenson, I can only give you the general idea I got, for she spoke of him in an off-hand kind of way. I gathered that he was quite a little older'n her and slow-going, and though she seemed fond of him, I guess they wasn't much alike. I know he was married, for Fannie didn't like his wife; she couldn't get on with her and I always thought that was why she left home, though she was crazy about the city. I don't believe anything happened before she came here that she brooded over, any love affair, I mean; she never spoke of the boys back home except to laugh at 'em

for being satisfied to stick there. Oh, there just isn't any reason for what she did!"

"Who was the girl that worked in Ruthven's, the one whose aunt she boarded with before she came to you?"

"I can't remember the name, but it was uptown somewhere," Mrs. Horton replied. When the detective mentioned "headquarters" she had shrunk from him in horror, but his manner was so full of consideration and evident goodwill that in her bewilderment and deep trouble her unsuspecting mind opened to him. She reiterated: "Fannie hadn't anything to worry about from the past."

"That was a big jump for a little country girl without any pull, to go right from a cheap wholesale house like Ruthven's to such a swell shop as Louissette's." Stevenson seemed to be following a line of thought of his own. "How'd she make it?"

"Oh, that was luck—and her own pretty, smart air. She posed for some pictures Ruthven was getting out, advertising their early spring line just before Christmas, and Louissette saw them and sent for her. Fannie wasn't like a country girl, Mr. Stevenson; she had style and a proud little way of holding her head as if she belonged to society all her life! It wasn't only her prettiness made folks turn and look at her even in the simplest things she wore, there was something about her I can't explain and everybody admired her."

Mrs. Horton wiped her eyes on a damp rag of a handkerchief and the detective nodded.

"I get her type. Clothes-mad and covered with fake jewelry—is this her stuff? All of it?"

He suddenly emptied a glittering pile from his coat pocket upon the table and Mrs. Horton started, then leaned forward to examine it. Rings and earrings, brooches, necklaces, and pendants blurred before her eyes and their meretricious brilliance seemed to dull.

"I guess so," she responded uncertainly. "Fannie had an awful lot of it, but her liking for it was innocent enough, goodness knows! She'd have outgrown that foolishness later on, it was just because she'd wanted pretty things all her life, I guess."

"And sporty company? She didn't go with the kind of men that are usually attracted to a working girl, Mrs. Horton?"

"I know," the landlady sighed. Then she added in quick defense: "They was all right or she wouldn't have let them take her out; Fannie could take care of herself anywhere and she did! There isn't a living soul can say a word against her or would, Mr. Stevenson! Men all liked her, young and old, but she didn't give anyone a serious thought."

"There must have been some one." The detective smiled again. "You can't help seeing a lot when you run a boarding-house and you must have known who it was she liked best, or at least was kidding along. What's the most serious case she had?"

"None lately," Mrs. Horton disclaimed hastily and then checked herself. "Just a theater with one fellow, and a dance or a motor ride or a trip to one of the beaches in summer with another—that's the way Fannie's been going."

"‘Lately,’ you say; I mean before that." Stevenson's eyes narrowed as he gathered up the imitation jewels and thrust them back in his pocket. "You needn't be afraid to speak, this won't go any further. Who was it had a crush on her? You've got several men boarding here; was it one of them?"

Mrs. Horton's honest face flushed and her hands tightened in her lap.

"Mr. North don't count, he's just come, and as for Mr. Darley and Mr. Jordan, they both liked her, I guess. I never was one to gossip, and nothing ever come of it so there don't seem any use in talking about it now! Poor Fannie's dead——!"

Her tone was filled with very real distress, but Stevenson pursued inexorably:

"That's precisely why, Mrs. Horton. Darley's the older man gotten up like a sport, isn't he? Was he in love with her?"

"Mercy, no! He did start to take her out a great deal just a few weeks ago, but Fannie was young and she liked young company, and I shouldn't wonder if he found it kind of hard to keep up with her; anyway, she began going around with her boy friends again and Mr. Darley stood aside, but they've stayed good friends."

"And the young fellow, Jordan? He showed her attention, too?"

"Yes. He's lived here near three years, as fine and steady a boy as you'll find anywhere! He never seemed to have time to bother with girls before Fannie came, he was too taken up with making good in his business, but

she just kind of took him off his feet, I expect." Mrs. Horton caught herself once more. "Of course there wasn't any engagement or anything and maybe I only imagined it, but I thought he cared an awful lot for her. There wasn't any quarrel that I knew of, but they cooled off all of a sudden; she began going out more than ever and he buried himself in his work."

"What does Jordan do?"

"He sells steel office furnishings and he's been busy inventing some kind of a patent lock for filing cases. I don't know anything about it except that he gets his room in a clutter!" Mrs. Horton shrugged. "You see, Mr. Stevenson, I can't tell you anything. If Fannie went around with one gentleman friend more than another I didn't know it, and she was gay and light-hearted up to the very last minute. She's been out every single night this week."

"Do you know where, and who, she went with?" Stevenson had been thoughtfully pacing up and down with slow, swinging strides, but now he halted in front of the landlady. "What time did she get in each night? You've got a quiet house here, haven't you; don't you usually know what hours your guests keep?"

"I should hope so!" Mrs. Horton straightened in her chair. "Not that I'm nosey, but I sort of keep an eye on my young folks and I've never had a minute's trouble in all these years until this terrible thing came! I take a look 'round every night before I go to bed and I can generally tell who's in and out. Fannie got in early Monday night, but Tuesday she went to a dance—I let

her press a dress to wear; I remember because it was the day Mis' Moffat come. At Brewster Hall, the dance was, and she went to it with Mr. Rogers, the motion picture fellow. I don't know what time she came home then or the next night, for there wasn't any light in her room when I looked the last thing, and when she was late she never made any noise."

"You don't think she'd come in earlier and gone to bed?" the detective suggested.

"No. When she was home there was always a bright light in her room."

"Why?" Stevenson asked quickly. "What did she do? Write letters? Read?"

"I never thought about it," replied Mrs. Horton, surprised. "Fannie wasn't much of a letter writer unless she mailed them outside, and I never saw her with a book in her hand except a fashion magazine, maybe. She was always neat and dainty, though; I guess perhaps she was mending and fixing her clothes. Last night she musta got in early, for I saw a light in her room but everything was quiet. If she was in any trouble it musta come up while she was out and I just can't understand it!"

There was a little pause while she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes once more. Stevenson had turned as though about to pace back and forth again, but after a moment he wheeled to face her and she saw that he held in his hands a coil of slender but strong rope streaked with dust and soot. A slip noose had been made in it and the end which dangled was not frayed but had been cut clean.

"Did you ever see any rope like this before?" he asked.

Mrs. Horton's brow knit.

"It looks like a length of ordinary clothes-line to me," she replied. "I've got some just like it strung up on the roof; there wasn't room in the yard for all I needed."

"How do you get up there?"

"To the roof?" Mrs. Horton glanced up at him. "Why, through the trapdoor in the hall closet on the top floor; there's a ladder leading up to it. It's right by Fannie's door—oh, good Heavens! You don't mean——! That—that isn't the rope she—she——?"

Horror choked the words back in her throat and Stevenson nodded gravely.

"The body was hanging from this, Mrs. Horton, when the assistant medical examiner and I took it down. It has only recently been cut from a longer piece, and with some very sharp instrument; you can see how fresh the end is and how it has been chopped short off, not sawed through by a dull blade——"

"I don't want to see!" Mrs. Horton covered her face with her hands and her fat body shook. "Take it away! I—I can't look!"

"Never mind!" he returned with comforting reassurance. "You needn't look at it now, but I may ask you to later, to compare it with other pieces.—Now, you say the girl was always happy and light-hearted. Are you sure you didn't see any change in her lately? I want you to think carefully, please. Taking into consideration what has happened, can you recall a word, even a look,

that would show something was on her mind?—Something that not only grieved her but frightened her?”

“Why should she be frightened?” Mrs. Horton half rose from her chair. “Folks don’t kill themselves because they’re afraid, unless maybe they’ve done something terrible that’s against the law, and of course Fannie couldn’t have done that! What in the world would she be afraid of?”

“You haven’t answered my question!” A note of stern authority had manifested itself in his tone. “I want to know if at any time lately the girl appeared to be in dread of anything! It doesn’t matter what, that’s our lookout.—Haven’t you noticed the least change in her?”

“Why, no!” There was a shade less certainty in Mrs. Horton’s voice. “She’s been real nervous lately, but I thought that was because she’d been on the go so much and maybe tired out with the spring rush of trade. It did seem as if she was just living on excitement and keeping herself going, and more than once I had half a mind to tell her she ought to rest, but she seemed to be having such a good time——”

“How did she show this nervousness?” the detective interrupted.

“Well, she jumped if anybody spoke to her sudden, and she kept looking around over her shoulder if she happened to sit with her back to a door or window—not that she was still a minute if she could help it! I never saw anybody so restless as she’s been lately. I said ‘good-bye’ to her at the door out there, two—three

mornings when she was starting for work and she'd peek out of the vestibule as if to see if somebody was there and then scoot for the cars, and when she come home she'd hurry, no matter how tired she was. One night last week at dinner the fuse blew out and I thought she'd have hysterics before Agnes brought lamps—goodness! It never come to me until just now, but it does sound as if Fannie had been actually afraid, doesn't it?"

Stevenson did not reply directly but he nodded as though what she had told him was in accord with some idea of his own.

"How long ago did you notice the first indications of this in the girl?"

"Let me see!" Mrs. Horton passed her hand over her forehead. "Two—three weeks, anyway; maybe a month. It's been getting worse, now that I think of it.—Mr. Stevenson, what does it mean? You as much as told me to mind my own business a minute ago, but it *is* my business! I must know what come to Fannie Gillespie right here under my own roof, and what she was so afraid of that she killed herself!"

"Perhaps she was afraid of the very thing that did come to her here under this roof, Mrs. Horton," Stevenson remarked quietly. "Her door was locked from the inside, it is true, and there isn't any fire escape nor ladder nor even vine outside her window, but for all that we have no proof that the hand which slipped that noose over her head was her own!"

CHAPTER V

“‘WHY SOME MEN KILL’”

MID-MORNING brought comparative quietude to the shocked household, for with the removal of Fannie Gillespie's body the crowd outside had gradually disintegrated and only a few loiterers remained to hover at a respectful distance from the two officers who still guarded the door.

Within, the lower floor was for the time being deserted, although the echo of a futile debate between Agnes and Caroline came up from the kitchen. There had been no need for the detective to enjoin silence upon the landlady; after their interview she had gone directly to her room utterly overwhelmed by the added horror of his implied suggestion, and in Henry Jordan's large, pleasant bedchamber beside hers the young man himself, Simeon Darley, and the new boarder, Edgar North, talked together in low, subdued tones. Mrs. Moffat was pacing the floor of her own room at the front and above Myrtle Harris tossed in the troubled sleep superinduced by Doctor Vaughn's opiate.

The door of the hall closet on the top floor stood wide, a pale square of light streaming down into it from the opened trapdoor, and on the roof the detective Stevenson was down upon hands and knees in the soot and grime,

minutely studying the blurred outline which showed here and there in the thick covering of dust and cinders. Parallel lines of slender, none-too-clean rope stretched from pole to pole across the roof-top except in one space where newly-cut ends hung in loops from opposite uprights and clothes-pins were scattered here and there.

A package hastily wrapped in a newspaper lay beside Stevenson, and he sat back on his heels, taking from it a large and exceedingly battered shoe with frayed, dangling strings. This he proceeded to fit over the prints he had been examining in the dust and then, shaking his head, he rewrapped the dilapidated footgear and, rising, approached one of the posts from which depended a length of the severed clothesline. Detaching it, he coiled it tightly and placed it in the package with the shoe, then crossed to the trapdoor and descended, closing it carefully after him.

In the big back bedroom on the second floor, Simeon Darley, fully clothed now even to the tie of gorgeous hue which flowed beneath the lowest fold of his chin, sat dejectedly on the side of the bed, his hands nervously twisting the coverlet and his dull eyes staring at the floor as though to fix forever in his mind the faded, commonplace pattern of the rug. Henry Jordan moved restlessly about, rumpling his curly, reddish-brown hair now and then with an impatient gesture, his haggard face boyish no longer but stamped with lines of maturity and suffering, while from his position by the window, Edgar North glanced in a sympathetic but diffident manner from one to the other of them.

A little silence had fallen, but as he halted, Henry Jordan broke it.

"I'm going to find out!" He struck one hand into the cupped palm of the other. "I'm going to find out what made her do it and who it was that brought upon her whatever trouble she was in! It wasn't any fault of hers—you didn't know her, North, but Simmy can tell you that it would be as far from her to do anything dishonest she'd be afraid to have found out as it would be to lose her head over some hopeless, romantic affair. She just lived for excitement and the bright lights fascinated her, blinded her to everything else. She's got a brother somewhere, but nobody else, and as a friend I mean to get at the truth. If any one is responsible I'm going to make him pay!"

"I was a friend of hers, too," Simeon reminded him, shaking his head dolefully. "I was willing to be more than that when I saw that you—well, that you and she weren't going to hit it off, after all, but she would never have married an old fellow like me and I stopped making more of a fool of myself than I was born to be. There's nothing I wouldn't have done for her, though, and nothing I won't do now, but I can't see what could have driven her to take such a step! Of course she didn't do anything dishonest, Henry, and as for being in love——! I don't believe it could ever hit her hard enough to make her feel that life wasn't worth living! As you say, the bright lights were all that counted. You met her at dinner last night, Mr. North—God, it don't seem possible what's happened since!—and you saw how gay and high-

spirited she was; would you have thought she had it in her mind to kill herself before morning?”

North shook his head gravely.

“No, suh, assuredly not. As Mr. Jordan says, I didn’t know her, but the young lady appeared to be most happy and full of life. She must, of co’sse, have been in some sorrow or misery, but she certainly kept it to herself right bravely.”

“Well, it isn’t any good for us to keep milling it over and over.” Simeon rose wearily, the jauntiness of yesterday lost in a profound depression that made his dashing attire seem all the more incongruous, although his figure now appeared pathetic rather than droll. “I just want you to know, Henry, that I’m with you in whatever you’re going to do to find out if any one drove that poor child to her death! We owe it to her, and as you say, she has nobody else. I’ll go crazy if I don’t stop thinking about it and I’ve got to get down to the office somehow later. I’m going to see if that detective fellow has gone.”

When the door had closed behind him, Edgar North stepped forward.

“I’m a stranger to you-all, but I would like to help, too, if there is anything that I can do,” he offered. “The young lady was your friend and I only met her once, but down where I come from a woman, especially alone and making her own way, is a kind of charge for every man to be of service to. There is nothing anybody can do for Miss Gillespie now, except to reckon with whoever caused her to suffer, just as men-folks kin to her would

do and I hope you-all will count me in, like any neighbor."

"That's good of you, North!" Henry exclaimed as he met the other's resolute glance. "Of course if her brother comes forward to look after the situation it won't be up to any of us and I have an idea he's the sort of fellow who would rather let the whole thing drop and be forgotten than lift a finger to stir up gossip in his home town. Still, I'll never rest till I know just what happened last night!"

Stevenson had not descended from the top floor, but leaving his package beside the closet door he pushed open the one which swung on yawning hinges. The little room was flooded with light now, for the shade had been pulled up at the single window and a veering streak of sunshine played over the clean, neatly mended rug to the foot of the narrow, tumbled bed.

Its two snowy pillows were piled one on top of the other and still hollowed in the center where a restless head had lain upon them, and the coverlet and bedding were flung back, trailing over the square, shining brass footboard. A faded pink cotton kimono lay over a chair beneath which was a pair of rose-colored boudoir slippers with one rosette gone. A box of chocolates was upset on the floor, and a small, crumpled handkerchief had been dropped nearby, but there was no other sign of disorder in the room, save the second chair, overturned.

A white celluloid toilet set, flanked by bottles of perfume and jars and boxes of cosmetics, was spread on the bureau top and a row of high-heeled shoes and slippers, for the most part gay hued and paper soled, were ranged

along a low shelf. From the bracket of the single gas burner, above it, lengths of ribbon dangled. The room contained in addition only a washstand and a small trunk placed just under the window, but the half-open door of the closet revealed close-packed gowns of butterfly coloring varied by sober black.

The detective's keen, darting glance took in every detail, although he had already given the room a cursory examination, and now he stepped once more to the window and drew aside the curtain of dotted swiss.

The fire-escape reached up to the floor below and four stories down the cleanly-swept square of the cement yard showed like a white patch crossed with the straight, thread-like shadows of the clotheslines stretching from fence to fence. The yards on either side were littered and unkempt, but that directly in the rear sported a grass plot with a few struggling bushes putting forth bedraggled buds, and from each window-sill with its box of sturdy geraniums, trailing vines descended.

That must be a private residence, Stevenson concluded, one of the few remaining in that section, but a stone's throw from Broadway, which had formerly housed some of the city's most conservative families. Could any one within it have looked from their rear windows on the previous night and seen something which might give him a clue to this problem, which to his vision seemed to be growing more and more complex?

He turned away at last and approached the bureau, opening one drawer after another to discover in the topmost a confusion of gloves, handkerchiefs, more ribbons,

and a dozen dainty accessories to feminine attire, while below cheap, lacy underwear and sleazy silk stockings were all that met his gaze. Nowhere did there appear to be a scrap of paper bearing even an address, much less the picture postcards and notes which girls of Fannie Gillespie's type usually treasured.

Their absence was in itself significant, and he tried the hatboxes on the shelf in the closet. One contained scraps of lace and ribbon and another unmended stockings and lingerie, but the rest held only the collection of millinery for which they had been originally intended. The drawer of the washstand yielded a bottle of ink, pens, and a box of lavender-tinted note-paper, but not a line had been written upon it and he turned his attention to the trunk.

It was locked, but in a leather vanity case which hung beside the mirror the detective found the key and hastily flung back the lid. The top tray was evidently a repository for still more finery but past its usefulness and Stevenson lifted it out, placing it across the bed. The bottom of the trunk was littered with the very souvenirs which he had been seeking; snapshots and group photographs of the sort procurable at the various resorts and amusement parks, ribbons from candy boxes and bunches of violets, menus and paper favors from many restaurants along the Rialto, and a collection of horns, rattlers and other noise-producing toys, which attested to the girl's presence at frequent carnivals and holiday festivities.

In all of the photographs, Fannie Gillespie herself was prominently featured, sometimes with a taller, dark,

laughing girl in company with several youths, but more frequently alone with just one young man and not the same young man except in three instances. The detective rapidly sorted them out; in three of the pictures her fellow-boarder, Henry Jordan, was posed with her, in half a dozen her companion was a man slightly older, loose-limbed and yet with the unconscious poise of an athlete. His nose was aquiline, his lips firm, and jaw prominent, and a long lock of dark hair strayed carelessly down over his forehead.

The person who appeared more frequently than either of the other two with Fannie Gillespie in her gallery was in striking contrast to them. Slender, blond, and almost effeminately dapper, his clothes were obviously custom-made and he wore them with the studied effect of one habituated to self-exploitation. The smug countenance with its small, close-clipped mustache and cleft chin was familiar to Stevenson and he placed him at once as Jack Rogers, a motion picture actor whom he had seen more than once on the screen.

To the various young men in the other photographs he gave but a passing glance, yet tied them all up together with a bit of violet ribbon and, laying them at one side, continued his search.

He had not so far found a scrap of writing, but in a corner of the trunk he came at last upon a five-pound candy box filled to the brim with letters. Taking it out he dropped the trunk-lid and seated himself upon it. The letters were for the most part mere scraps of notes making or breaking engagements and signed only with first

names. They were undated, but the postmarks supplied that deficiency and showed that they were the collection of nearly a year back. Several in purple ink on violet note-paper bore the name "Eileen," a dozen or more in a large masculine hand with underlines and broad flourishes were signed "Jack," and condescendingly affectionate in tone, addressing the recipient as "Girly-kins" or "Little-girl," but they were nearly all half jocular excuses for forgotten or ignored engagements. Eight or ten notes, however, in a plain, heavy writing with deep down-strokes were in quite a different tenor; beginning invariably "Dear Fan," they reproached her for missed appointments, coldness and unkindness, hinting at flirtations and fickleness on her part, and pleading humbly for her favor. Later ones, as indicated by the postmarks, were more hurt and resentful in tone as though the writer's patient devotion were tried beyond endurance and the final one mailed some six months before was an impassioned if ungrammatical farewell. They were signed "Frank."

There were "Joes" and "Dicks," a "Bert," a "Fred," and numerous other masculine names attached to various epistles, but they appeared to be from mere admiring acquaintances and of little moment, and the box was almost empty. None of them had been postmarked "Bison" nor could they by any stretch of the imagination have been written by a brother, and none contained the least reference which would give a clue to the previous night's tragedy.

At the very bottom of the box, however, were several

notes of a few lines each, without envelopes and folded into small triangles. They were written in pencil and half of them were unsigned, but at sight of the name attached to the rest the detective frowned thoughtfully and gave himself with complete absorption to their perusal.

The noon whistles blew and a renewed stir and bustle throughout the house indicated that the normal routine was being resumed in spite of the tragedy. Mrs. Horton, her eyes still red and a look of shrinking terror stamped upon her face, ordered the day's supplies over the telephone instead of venturing to market, Agnes was straightening such of the rooms as she could gain admittance to, and Mrs. Moffat was assisting Myrtle Harris to dress in the event that the detective would release her to go to her work at the motion picture house.

In the drawing room, with the embargo on tobacco lifted for once, Simeon Darley and the young Southerner had foregathered again, but Henry Jordan still kept to his room, pacing back and forth as though inaction were a torture. The presence of his two fellow boarders had been a trial, but he found their absence insupportable and turned with relief when a knock sounded upon his door. It was the detective, Stevenson.

“You wanted to see me?” There was a note of surprise in his voice but he added quickly: “Oh, yes! I was the first to enter the room behind the policeman after he broke down the door. We didn't touch the— the body! It wasn't necessary, anybody could have seen that it was too late! Come in, won't you?”

Stevenson entered, closing the door, but he did not seem to see the chair which the young man indicated. Instead, he advanced to the center table, standing with his back to the light so that his face was in shadow.

"You knew Fannie Gillespie pretty well, didn't you?" There was in his manner now none of the confidential, sympathetic note he had used in his interview with the landlady. "Ever meet her before she came here to board?"

Henry shook his head.

"No."

"How long was it after you first met her that you and she became engaged?"

"We never were." Henry started slightly and his face flushed. "I admired Miss Gillespie a lot——"

"It won't do!" the detective interrupted shortly. "You were in love with the girl!"

"Yes, I was, or at least I thought so; it amounts to the same thing, I suppose." Henry straightened, throwing back his shoulders, and eyed the other steadily. "Miss Gillespie didn't care for me, however, and there was an end to it. I don't see how that matters now, or what it's got to do with your investigation."

"Don't you?" Stevenson came a step forward and rested his knuckles on the table. "There was an understanding between you two, wasn't there?"

"Not a definite one."

"Definite enough for you to take it pretty hard when she threw you over!" A slow smile grew on the detec-

tive's face. “Why did she, Jordan? What was the row about?”

“Miss Gillespie did not ‘throw me over,’ as you call it!” Henry retorted hotly. “I’ve told you that I admired her and thought for a time that I was in love with her; perhaps I was, but I don’t see what business it is of the authorities! Miss Gillespie did not care enough about me to marry me and told me so, but there wasn’t any ‘row’!”

“How long was it after she came here that you began going around with her?”

“Oh, several months. She was so popular and had so many friends that I never thought there would be a chance for me and I was taken up with my work. It was late in the summer after she came back from her vacation that I asked her to go to a band concert with me in the Park and from then on—— . . .”

He paused and Stevenson finished for him.

“From then on you were sweethearts. Even if she didn’t care enough about you to marry you, she let you think she did, it was all fixed in your mind at least, wasn’t it?”

“I had misunderstood Miss Gillespie’s attitude toward me,” responded Henry stiffly. “It was not her fault and the matter was ended some time ago. I don’t wish to discuss it.”

“’Fraid you’ll have to, young man!” There was a sterner note in the detective’s tone. “You and the girl exchanged notes that didn’t go through the mail. What did you do—slip them under her door?”

"No." Henry was plainly taken aback. "We put them in the big vase that stands in the wall niche at the turn of the stairs just outside here, on this floor. It all began only in fun and we didn't do it regularly——"

He stopped, for Stevenson had taken a handful of the little triangular folded notes from his pocket and was slowly opening them. He showed one of the unsigned ones.

"Is this your writing?"

Henry nodded.

"Yes. You'll find my name on some of them, if Miss Gillespie kept them all. What of it? Surely you don't imagine that what was to her merely a—a flirtation has anything to do with what happened last night!"

"Do you recall the occasion when you wrote this?" Stevenson had been rapidly running through the notes ignoring his protest, and now he read aloud: "'Dear Fannie. I've been thinking over what you said and I don't see my way clear to taking you to that masquerade. Dear, I'm sorry, but you know my circumstances and what I'm working for. Since Christmas we've spent all that I saved in the six months before and I must call a halt some time. Be my own girl and come with me to the skating rink instead; we'll drop in afterwards for a dance and some ice cream anywhere you say. Don't be angry, sweetheart, we can't go on this way. Henry.'"

"I remember that, all right. It was just before St. Valentine's Day and Miss Gillespie wanted to go to a masquerade where the tickets alone would have been more than I could afford," Henry responded a trifle grimly.

“She went, though?” the detective suggested.

“With some one else. That was the beginning of the break between us, but we stayed good friends. I couldn’t give her what she had to have and we both realized it.”

“Good friends, eh?—How about this? ‘You can’t mean it! I won’t give you up! I had rather see you dead before me than belonging to somebody else, and you can’t play with me as you have with the others! You have driven me half crazy, Fannie, I love you so!’ ”

“For God’s sake, what’s the good of going over all that!” Henry groaned. “Haven’t I told you that I was wild about her and I made a fool of myself? Don’t you think it’s bad enough for me to remember now without hearing my own words! I’m not the only fellow that’s been hard hit in his life, but it’s all over and done with now!”

“All over, last night!” Stevenson assented coolly. “You’d rather have seen her dead and you’ve had your wish!”

“What do you mean?” Henry demanded hoarsely.

“What did you mean when you wrote this?” the detective countered. “‘I understand you at last! I wouldn’t let myself believe it before. I can see now why some men kill and think the price well paid to rid the world of some one better out of it! You never cared, you don’t know what it is, and when I look back and think what a fool I was and all that I hoped and planned with you just laughing at me I feel like killing somebody myself! I warn you, you have driven me mad!’—That’s pretty plain, Jordan, but I guess we’d like to know about

it a little more definitely. You admit you wrote this, the handwriting is yours, you were in love with the girl and she turned you down. You threatened her——!”

“Stop right there!” Henry exclaimed in a low voice. “Are you accusing me of—murder? Her—her body was found with the door locked on the inside! I was wild with jealousy and disappointment when I wrote that, but it meant nothing! You don’t think that I could have had anything to do with her death? It’s monstrous!”

“The door was locked from inside, but the window was open and there are marks on the sill,” Stevenson returned significantly. “The rope that hung her was strong enough to bear the weight of a man also if it was let down from the roof where it was cut from a clothes-line. I guess you’d better come downtown with me, Jordan, and explain about those letters to the Chief!”

CHAPTER VI

LOCKWOOD STERETT'S OPINION

“**I**’LL never believe it, never!” Mrs. Horton plumped down in the rocker in Mrs. Moffat’s room, her lips compressed in a straight line and her mild eyes blazing. “When that smart Aleck of a detective first talked to me yesterday he hinted that—that it wasn’t poor Fannie’s own hands fastened that rope around her neck, but I was so overcome I didn’t guess what he was getting at! I’d like to’ve died when he took Henry away, and why that boy won’t clear himself——!”

“What did he say to you this morning when you went down to see him?” Mrs. Moffat asked.

“He wouldn’t even see me.” The landlady shook her head mournfully. “I gave a piece of my mind to that detective, though, when he came again! It’s terrible enough to have that poor, dear child dead, to say nothing of her killing herself, without Henry being accused of murdering her! I don’t wonder he’s so broke up he don’t know what to do, seeing as he used to be crazy about her! I declare I think the police must be downright fools, holding him like this when they know they’ll only have to let him go!”

Mrs. Moffat pursed her lips reflectively.

“Has he a lawyer?”

"Yes. The firm he works for sent him a big one; Lockwood Sterett, of Sterett, Hecksher & Mullanafey. They defended that girl last year who was accused of shooting her brother-in-law right in the lobby of the Odeon Theatre and the jury acquitted her without leaving their seats. I understand Henry wasn't hardly willing to see him.—I can't make out what's got into that boy!"

"I remember reading about that case. It looks pretty serious, doesn't it, if it's going to take a lawyer as celebrated as that to get young Mr. Jordan out of this trouble?" Mrs. Moffat observed. "The police may be making out a stronger case against him than we have any idea of."

"Oh, it's only that the firm want him to have the best," Mrs. Horton replied easily. "They think a lot of Henry, you know. He went right into the factory and learned all about the steel construction of that furniture from the ground up; that's why he can sell it so well, and I shouldn't wonder if he made his everlasting fortune with that lock he's inventing! I must say it's a dreadful thing to bring such a charge as this against a fine young man like Henry, but he ain't the weak kind to let it hurt his whole future and he'll never in the world be held for trial. They couldn't!"

"He must have been in his room all night before last," Mrs. Moffat spoke as though to herself. "Did he go out earlier in the evening? It's funny I didn't hear him come in, when his room is just back of this and I'm a light sleeper."

"I heard him," the landlady affirmed. "I wouldn't give that Stevenson the satisfaction of telling him, but it was nearly midnight and he walked the floor for the longest time afterward; I had half a mind to get up and ask him if he was sick or anything, for he ain't usually restless like that.—There's the bell. Do you suppose it's that dratted detective again?"

She rose, patting her gray hair nervously and smoothing her voluminous black skirt, and after a brief interval Agnes' slip-shod feet could be heard scuttling up the stairs.

"Mis' Horton!" Her watery eyes were staring and her breath caught in her throat. "Who d'you think's down in the parlor? A man who calls himself 'Gillespie'! Mr. William Gillespie!"

"Lord A'mighty!" Mrs. Horton gasped. "Poor Fannie's brother! What in the world am I to say to him?"

She bustled out and down the stairs to find a young man standing by the window in the parlor. He turned as she entered and came slowly forward, a tall, awkward young man in an ill-fitting suit of gray with a wide new mourning band sewed crookedly on one sleeve, and a made-up black tie about a collar a size too big, through the wings of which his Adam's apple moved up and down convulsively. His prominent eyes were a paler blue than Fannie's, his features sharper, and the hair slicked down flatly over his low forehead was a dull mouse-color, nevertheless there was a slight, indefinable resemblance which made the landlady's eyes blur and she impulsively held out both hands.

"Mr. Gillespie, I was just saying that I don't know what I'm going to say to you nor how I can let you know what I feel! You're a relation of Fannie?"

"I'm her brother." His nasal voice was flat and unemotional and he shook one of her hands listlessly. "Feller from the New York police came up to Bison last night and told me what had happened to her and my wife thought I'd better get down here myself and see what was to be done. I ain't heard from Fannie in a long time. She didn't leave any word for me, did she?"

Mrs. Horton shook her head.

"No, but she—she often talked about you to me, Mr. Gillespie." In her desire to comfort him she goodheartedly stretched a point, yet she felt vaguely with a repelled sense of frustration that this long-faced, solemn young man was not in any pressing need of it. "You're the only relation she had in the world, ain't you?"

"Yes, but we weren't much alike. I'm steady-going, but she was all for gay doings. I don't know's I ever expected to hear from her again and this—this is an awful shock! My wife's on the School Board and quite a worker in our church and it's going to make it pretty hard for her if there's a lot of scandal. We were set against Fannie coming to the city from the first and did everything we could to stop her, but she was possessed to get here ever since she was a little thing, and this is what's come of it! I've got a first-class shoe store and she could have clerked it for me or kept the books, but it didn't satisfy her, she had to have New York life. Well, she got it! I shouldn't wonder if I had to shut up store

for a while and take my wife away, and it's right in my busy season!"

Mrs. Horton's face flushed and her eyes snapped.

"I guess poor Fannie's suffered more'n anybody else will!" she remarked. "What did the man that went up to find you tell you about her?"

"That she'd hung herself!" A dull flush had mounted, too, in his sharp face and his jaw set. "I don't know any more and I don't want to! She had a good home to come back to if she was minded and we'd always have looked out for her no matter what kind of a muss she got herself into. There wasn't any call for her to do what she did, though my wife always said nothing but harm would come of her leaving us like that."

"Fannie was as good and sweet a girl as ever I had in my house!" Mrs. Horton declared indignantly. "There wasn't any harm come to her till—till the night before last and heaven only knows what that was! They told you she—she'd killed herself, but they ain't so sure. They didn't tell you that they've arrested one of my boarders on suspicion of knowing something about her death?"

William Gillespie shook his head, his slow mind evidently taking in with difficulty the portent of her words. Then his flush receded and his jaw sagged.

"Murder!" he mumbled thickly. "You mean they think somebody murdered her? This boarder of yours—what makes them——?"

"Because he wanted to marry her, but I guess she must have thrown him over. Not that there's a single thing

against him; the police are only trying to make it out worse than it is, though goodness knows it's terrible enough, Mr. Gillespie! Henry Jordan is a splendid young man, and he'd never have harmed a hair of your sister's head, no matter what they say!"

Gillespie seemed scarcely to have heard. His bony, large-knuckled hands were opening and closing with a tenseness which made them tremble and a cold, glittering light had dawned in his pale eyes.

"If it was that!" Cords stood out in his throat and his Adam's apple bobbed more convulsively than ever. "If Fan didn't do it after all—if somebody killed her—I'm glad I come!"

"Nobody knows whether they did or not, but it wasn't Henry Jordan!" Mrs. Horton reiterated hastily. "Don't you believe that for a minute, Mr. Gillespie! Fannie hadn't any reason in the world that any of us can think of to kill herself, but it seems more impossible still that anybody else could have done it, even if they had cause, which they hadn't! Folks can't be got up out of their beds, with the gas on bright, and—and hung, without struggling or making some kind of an outcry that would have been heard, for though Fannie was the only one sleeping on that floor, the rooms just below was all occupied, and she'd locked her door from the inside."

"The police ought to know what they're doing." Gillespie's thin lips tightened. "I guess I'll get on down to their headquarters and see what they can tell me. I suppose it'll cost a sight of money to prove anything, but the State'll likely pay it and as long as there's bound to be

scandal it might as well be proved that Fan didn't fly in the face of Providence and kill herself. We'll be able to hold up our heads, anyway!"

"I s'pose," Mrs. Horton's own lips curled. "I s'pose if somebody—not Henry—did murder Fannie you'd just as lief see 'em punished for it even if it did make a little more talk?"

"I calculate the law'll take its course, ma'am." He turned toward the door, but paused on the threshold. "We're peace'ble, law-abiding folks up my way and I don't aim to go against the police; if they say it was murder they'll take care of who did it, and if it turns out that Fannie killed herself we'll just bury her right and try to live it down. It won't bring Fan back to get in more scandal than we be in a'ready. I'm stopping at the Witlow Hotel if you should want to reach me, but I'll be much obliged if you won't let on to any of the fellers that write pieces for the papers; my wife wouldn't want me to say anything. I'll make all the arrangements for the funeral as soon as the police'll give me leave."

"And your sister's things?" Mrs. Horton asked in a repressed tone. "The police are holding 'em now, but do you want I should send 'em to you?"

"Yes. 'Maple Street, Bison,' is the address; I guess likely my wife can find some use for them," he returned promptly, then hesitated. "You don't know if there was any wages coming to her where she worked, do you?"

"No, I don't!" the disgusted landlady snapped. "I guess maybe you can find out if you try, though!"

"I calculate I can," Gillespie nodded, unmoved. "Did she owe for board or anything else that you know of, Mrs. Horton? I don't aim for her to have any debts left behind her, though she was always awful extravagant."

"Fannie didn't owe me anything and I ain't heard of her getting in debt," she replied with a final effort at self-restraint. "I guess the funeral will be about the only expense you'll be put to, Mr. Gillespie, and if you feel that it's too much for you, I'll be glad to pay it myself, as I told the police. Seems to me it's little enough to do for her!"

"I'm obliged to you, ma'am, but it won't cost much." He was impervious to the shaft. "Good-day to you."

Mrs. Horton did not trust herself to reply to the salutation except by the merest of nods and when the front door had closed behind him she started for the stairs, but encountered Simeon Darley in the hall.

"Did you hear him?" she demanded. "That was Fannie's own brother and all he cared about was to know if there was any money due her at the store! Do you wonder she got away from home quick's ever she saved up carfare?"

Simeon nodded gravely.

"I thought he'd be like that if he showed up at all. Little Fannie wouldn't have dropped her relations if they hadn't been pretty mean to her. I can't get over the shock about Henry, though! Why, just a little before they took him away he told me and that new young fellow, North, that he wouldn't rest till he found out why she'd

killed herself! That don't look as if he could have had a suspicion it wasn't suicide, let alone that he—he knew anything, unless he's a lot deeper than we ever thought."

"Why, how you talk, Mr. Darley!" Mrs. Horton exclaimed in amazed reproach. "Surely you don't believe——?"

"I don't know what to think!" He shook his head. "I'd never have believed it of Henry, myself, but the police don't usually risk making mistakes and there's no telling what they know. He's the quiet kind you can't always make out and he did seem to take Fannie's turn-down mighty cool, considering how crazy he was about her; it seemed kind of funny to me, now that I remember. It don't seem possible, knowing the boy as we do, that he could have been planning such a fearful thing, but how are we to judge what was going on in his mind?"

"Well, I can, still having what gumption I was born with!" Mrs. Horton declared loyally. "As to the police not making mistakes——! There goes the door-bell again! If it's that Gillespie man back I don't know's I'll be responsible for what I may say to him!"

But it was not William Gillespie. The gentleman who entered when Agnes opened the door was middle-aged and urbane, with large-lensed glasses astride his aristocratic nose, straight, smooth-shaven lips, and a clean-cut fighting jaw. The tones in which he announced his name and errand were low, but they carried to the ears of Mrs. Horton and her boarder, who had discreetly

retreated under the slope of the stairs, and the landlady waddled quickly forward.

"Mr. Sterett? I'm Mis' Horton and I must say I'm glad to see you! Come right in the parlor; I heard Henry Jordan's firm had got you to look out for him in this trouble, and if there's anything I can tell you I'll be very pleased."

"Thank you." The attorney bowed and placing his hat on the table took the seat to which she motioned after closing the door and dropping into her own chair. "I find that my client is too disturbed in mind at present to confer with me at any length and there are some details you can readily give me."

"Go right ahead and ask me what you like!" Mrs. Horton folded her hands. "I want to say first off, though, that I know Henry didn't have a thing in the world to do with poor Fannie Gillespie's death. I haven't had a minute's doubt of him and I ain't going to, no matter what the police try to saddle him with!"

"That is gratifying to hear, Mrs. Horton, but I may say I had no misgivings as to your attitude." Lockwood Sterett smiled genially. "We understand each other perfectly, I think, and you realize you will only be helping Mr. Jordan by giving me your confidence. You have had a great deal of experience with young people?"

"If twenty years' boarding them and kind of watching over them means anything, I should say I had!" Mrs. Horton responded with emphasis. "I like to have 'em 'round me and they know it, and usually they get to running to me with their troubles. No harm ever come to

a single one of 'em under my roof until the other night!"

"I'm sure of that. My client tells me that at one time he was strongly attached to the unfortunate young girl who is dead; can you tell me how serious, in your estimation, that attachment was?"

He eyed her inquiringly and Mrs. Horton's glance fell.

"'Bout as serious as it could be, I guess, for Henry's real serious in everything and I never knew him to bother with any other girl. It come on him slow, for Fannie'd been here several months before he began to pay her attention, but though he got it real bad, as everybody could see, he didn't lose his head. It's my opinion he realized she wasn't the girl for him, at the same time she made up her mind he couldn't give her the kind of good times and expensive parties she wanted, and he was sensible and strong enough not to let it get the best of him. There's no denying he cared, though."

"I see," the attorney said slowly. "There were others, no doubt, who were waiting to give Fannie Gillespie these good times?"

"Plenty. She was pretty as a picture and full of life and innocent fun; she had a lot of gentlemen friends who could spend more'n Henry.—Not that Fannie was what they call a gold-digger, but she was crazy about the bright lights and she just never thought what things cost, and with auto racers and motion picture fellows it seems to be easy come and easy go——"

"Actors, do you mean,—and race drivers?" Sterett interrupted. "Who were they? Did you know them?"

Mrs. Horton gave their names and added:

"I don't think Fannie cared for anybody; at least, she never would have killed herself over any man living! That's what makes it all the more mysterious, for she must have done it herself!"

"Then there was undoubtedly some reason for it and we'll have to find that reason," the attorney remarked quickly. "That will be the first step in refuting the circumstantial evidence brought against my client, for we cannot establish a corroborated alibi for that night. Mr. Jordan has already informed the authorities that after dining he went out alone and walked for several hours, encountering no one he knew, and that on his return he let himself in with his key and went directly to his room without seeing any other member of the household."

"His room's right next mine, and I heard him come in, if that'll help any!" Mrs. Horton declared eagerly. "He didn't leave it again, either, at least not till I fell asleep and that must have been a good hour. It was twelve or a little before when he got home."

"I'm afraid that will have little value." Sterett shook his head. "The autopsy has shown that the young woman came to her death some six or seven hours before the body was found, presumably between one and three in the morning. You say that in your opinion she would never have killed herself because of a love affair; can you suggest any possible motive for her suicide?"

"No, I can't, and the whole thing's just about driving me crazy!" Mrs. Horton avowed. "There wasn't any reason, but neither was there for anybody to murder her! They can't ever fasten it on Henry, though, that's one

comfort! How soon do you suppose they'll let him go, Mr. Sterett?"

"When thirty men on the grand jury decide there is not sufficient evidence to hold him, Mrs. Horton," replied Sterett very gravely. "That they must so decide is not at all certain, and we must not underestimate the strength of the case against him. Henry Jordan, unless further and contradictory evidence comes to light, stands a grave chance of being indicted and brought to trial."

CHAPTER VII

NEW LIGHT

FANNIE GILLESPIE'S body had been taken to her former home and her brother came no more to the boarding-house after her pitiful finery and trinkets were packed and shipped. Mrs. Moffat completed her buying and returned to Ohio, Simeon Darley with a wondrous array of sport clothes departed upon his vacation, and the long, early summer days passed in a brooding suspense.

Edgar North, the bond salesman from New Orleans, had slipped quietly into the life of the household and proved to be a young man of regular if somewhat solitary habits and unfailing courtesy, but he maintained a reserve which Myrtle Harris' broadest hints for entertainment failed to penetrate and she gave him up in disgust.

Early in June a new boarder made her appearance, a tall, slim, quiet-voiced girl with smooth, nut-brown hair, delicate features and deep, serious violet-blue eyes. She was one of several under-secretaries to a prominent banker and Mrs. Horton was elated at her advent, but installed her with secret misgivings in the large front room on the top floor. No one had climbed that last flight of stairs since the tragedy except Agnes, on dreaded cleaning days, and she never passed that closed door at

the rear without feeling the scant hair rise on her head and goose flesh stand out upon her lean, wiry arms. Caroline, the cook, had flatly refused to avail herself further of the roof for clothes-drying purposes, vouchsafing an occult reason in addition to its grim memories.

"Debils or ghose's, 'twarn't nothin' human done put dat rope 'roun' po' Miss Fan's neck dat night, ca'se huc-come dey steal mah shoe ouden de back yard?" she demanded. "Sot 'em out dere evenin' befo', I did, an' w'en I done look fo' em atter de tribulation o' de murder one o' 'em was gone! Dey done dat to wuk some spell on me, and I ain't gwine nowheres near dat air roof, not ag'in!"

Mrs. Horton felt constrained to warn Myrtle Harris not to reveal to the newcomer the details of Fannie Gillespie's death if she had not read them in the papers, but the precaution was needless, for Marian Gray herself broached the subject when they were sitting on the steps of the high stoop one warm evening after dinner.

"It was very sad about the poor girl who died here a week or two ago, Mrs. Horton." Her tone was filled with a hesitating sympathy. "It must have been a terrible shock to you all."

"Shock is no name for it!" Mrs. Horton responded, feeling a sense of relief that this latest boarder knew, after all. Simmy Darley would be home soon from his early vacation and no amount of warning could stop his garrulous tongue. "I thought I should never get over it, Miss Gray, especially with what's before us when poor Henry Jordan is arraigned, but I guess you can stand

most things if you gotta. I never had a nicer girl in my house than poor Fannie, and the whole dreadful thing is a mystery to me! Mr. North met her—he come just the night before it happened—and he can tell you she didn't act like the thought of death had ever entered her mind."

"No. Miss Gillespie seemed ve'y happy and light-hearted." Thus appealed to, Edgar North replied in his slow, musical drawl. "She impressed me as being a most charming young lady, but of co'se I was in no position to judge her feelings. I am not familiar with the ways of No'thern co'te procedure but I cannot help thinking there may be room fo' doubt of the wisdom shown in the co'se taken."

"You mean about arresting Henry?" Mrs. Horton came to the point bluntly. "There wasn't any wisdom about it; it was the most awful piece of——!"

She paused, for Edgar North had risen and stepped aside as a dark, pretty girl hesitated for a moment and then came up the steps in a little rush, with a soft swish of her silk skirt.

"Why, Miss Gaffney——!"

"Mrs. Horton, can I see you for a few minutes? I thought perhaps you might not remember me, but——"

"Of course I do! You were poor Fannie's friend, that worked with her at Louissette's!" Mrs. Horton exclaimed as the girl halted. "You used to come here to see her, and I looked for you at the funeral in the undertaking parlors."

"I couldn't go!" Miss Gaffney responded in a low, shuddering tone, darting an uneasy, confused glance at

the other two from her bold, heavy-lashed eyes. "I've been wanting to talk to you, though, for ever so long, but I couldn't make up my mind."

"Come right in the parlor!" Mrs. Horton rose and led the way. "I'm awful glad you come! Did that brother of Fannie's show up at the store?"

"Yes. Wasn't he awful? You'd never think he and Fannie——! But that isn't what I came to see you about." The girl eyed the open window cautiously as she seated herself on the edge of a chair. "Mrs. Horton, will you promise never to say a word if I tell you something? The police detectives have been coming to the store and then the lawyer for that fellow who's been accused, and Louissette is wild! She needn't be, for the publicity didn't hurt her with the trade that buys the most, only the old, conservative crowd who fuss about a forty-dollar uncurled ostrich as if it was a hundred-and-fifty bird of paradise, but she likes their cars in the line in front of the door, and if anybody else comes asking for me on account of me being such friends with Fannie I'm afraid I'll lose my position. All the same, there's something on my mind that I've got to tell, and I don't know who else to go to! You'll keep it to yourself?"

"Something you know that nobody else does?" Mrs. Horton asked eagerly. "It can't help Fannie now, nor hurt her either, to have anything known, but if it's about Henry Jordan, if it'll make a difference in his being held for trial, what's the good of telling me, when it isn't to go any further?"

"Oh, I don't know what to do!" Miss Gaffney twisted

the wrist cords of her vanity case with nervous fingers. "It isn't about Mr. Jordan, though it might make a—a big difference. I met him when Fannie was going around with him and I thought she was silly to waste her time with a tight-wad like that who wasn't any fun, when there were heaps of just dandy boys waiting to show us wonderful times and take us out right. She did have sense enough after a while to break with him, but even though he did take it awful bad and act as if she'd done something terrible, I can't bring myself to think it was him killed her, if anybody did; not after the things she told me! You don't believe there's a—a possible chance that they'll hold him just because of those letters, do you, Mrs. Horton?"

"I didn't believe they could hold him even over night, but they did!" the landlady replied grimly. "If men whose business it is to judge murderers could take such a stand there's no telling what a fool grand jury will do! If you know anything that'll help him, even though he wasn't the kind to throw his money away on good times that didn't mean anything to a regular man, and you don't come forward and tell it, it'll be on your conscience the rest of your life, providing you've got one!"

"You needn't be mean to me!" the girl sniffed. "I've got to think of myself, too, haven't I? I'd never get taken on in a swell place like Louissette's again with more notoriety, and it isn't as if I really knew anything, only what Fannie was afraid of. I'm afraid, too! If Frank Ward knew I'd talked about him——!"

"That auto-racing feller?" Mrs. Horton interrupted.

"So Fannie was scared, after all, and it wasn't of what Henry might do! I s'pose you know you'll likely be called before the grand jury, anyway? Louissette can't blame you for that!"

"Not if I—I just don't know anything!" Miss Gaffney faltered.

"But you'll be under oath and you've got to tell the truth!" The older woman laid a plump hand on the girl's knee. "Mr. Sterett's been after you already, you say? Now, s'pose you was to go to him with me and tell him everything, leaving him to find out the truth without ever letting on the tip come from you? If you ain't thinking about doing right by Henry, don't you feel you kind of owe it to Fannie? Mr. Sterett won't let this Ward feller or anybody else make trouble for you, and it'll save you, maybe, from telling lies in court that you could go to jail for yourself if it was proved on you!"

Miss Gaffney cowered in her chair.

"Oh, it's terrible!" she moaned. "If you think Mr. Sterett wouldn't ever give me away . . . ?"

Twenty minutes later Mrs. Horton, in her best black beaded dress and a top-heavy bonnet, towed the reluctant witness determinedly into the attorney's luxurious library and explained the situation. Lockwood Sterett had been covertly amused at her somewhat incoherent telephone message, but he grew quickly serious when its purport was revealed.

Motioning suavely to chairs, he addressed himself with convincing reassurance to Eileen Gaffney.

"My dear young lady, no one shall ever know we have had this little conference! You were wise in coming to me, for I shall be prepared to shield you from awkward questioning at the forthcoming proceedings. You were Fannie Gillespie's closest friend and she naturally confided in you. Am I to understand that she was in fear of her life, and from some one other than my client?"

Eileen Gaffney nodded.

"I don't know that she thought Frank Ward would actually kill her, but she was afraid of him. She'd treated him the same way she did Mr. Jordan and other fellows besides, only he wasn't the kind to—to take a throw without coming back. He had an awful temper; Fannie told me once that he'd half killed another driver, because he thought he'd done something crooked to him in a road race, and he didn't do it openly, either! He waited for another race and then purposely ran him off a bridge!—I don't know, of course, only what Fannie told me——!"

"I understand," Sterett interposed with a nod. "Go on. When did Fannie Gillespie—er, throw him?"

"Last summer. She knew him a long time, before ever she came to Louissette's, where her and me got to be friends, and he was just crazy about her, more than Mr. Jordan, I guess. Anyway, he showed it more. He was a grand spender and he used to get a friend for me and take us out for elegant parties, with a car of his own and everything!" Eileen waxed enthusiastic, then her pretty face clouded and she shrugged. "He got going too strong, though, and wanted Fannie to marry him,

and right then he was cold with her. She canned him and took up with Mr. Jordan, and Frank just faded. I warned her he wouldn't take it like that and I was right, for he was only waiting; he'd sized up Mr. Jordan and knew just about how long Fannie would stand for free lectures and cheap movies when she'd been used to swell times! Sure enough, she turned Mr. Jordan down in February or March and, as soon as he saw her around in the big places again with Jack Rogers and Ben Newell and the crowd, Frank came back."

"You mean that Fannie Gillespie accepted his attentions again?" the attorney asked.

"She did that, all right!" Eileen giggled. Then her face grew very sober. "Fannie was willing for all the good times he'd give her, but she told him flat she wasn't going to have any more love nonsense; she was off that! It's funny that a fellow'll never get that through his head if he don't want to believe it; Frank didn't. He was more determined to marry her this time than before and at last Fannie got to be a little afraid of him."

"She told you so?" Sterett's eyes narrowed behind their wide-rimmed glasses. "When did this happen? What did she say?"

"It was about a month before—before she died." Eileen's rather shrill tones had lowered. "She'd been going out with a lot of fellows and Frank was getting sore about it. One morning at the store she told me she had had an awful fight with him the night before and he said he'd fix her so nobody else would want to go out with her. I asked her what he meant and she kind of

shivered and said maybe he'd throw vitriol at her or smash her up in his car or something; that he'd looked like murder! It was then she told me about the other driver he'd crippled, but the next minute she was laughing and said he wouldn't ever dare do anything to her, but I watched and from then on she was different; she wouldn't talk about it, but she was nervous and unhappy when she was going out with him. I asked her why she went and she said she had to kid him along till he left for Detroit and then she wouldn't bother with him any more."

"When did Frank Ward go to Detroit? It was the night before her body was discovered, wasn't it?"

"No. He was supposed to go then, but he didn't!" Her voice was a mere whisper now. "Fannie didn't tell me. She didn't know, and besides I didn't see her again after she went home from the store that afternoon. She'd been acting more and more nervous and a few days before she admitted to me at last that she was afraid of him; it was the first time any fellow had ever made her feel that way, but she knew something dreadful would happen before she got rid of him, and she wished she'd never laid eyes on him."

"You are sure of that?" Mr. Sterett tapped his desk thoughtfully. "You are positive those were her words?"

"Every one!" Eileen declared. "There'd been another quarrel, for she was getting so scared of him she had told him a story about some date or other, just as if he had a right to know where she was going, or who with,

and he caught her. He said she ought to have that lie choked back down her throat and if she didn't promise to lay off of everybody while he was away she'd never go out with anybody again! I was afraid for her, because none of my gentlemen friends would go that far, and I begged her not to see him any more, but she said she had to, for the last time. That last time was the night before she died, and it was somebody else told me what happened—I'd rather not say who——"

"Never mind that now. What was it?" Sterett leaned forward. "Do you mean about the scene in the Jazz-way restaurant when Rogers came to the table?"

Eileen flushed and hesitated.

"That wasn't all," she said at last. "Maybe you heard Jack was working in a new picture? Well, they laid him off and put someone else in his part; he don't get very big ones yet, so it was easy, but I guess maybe if you found out why he didn't go on with it—I couldn't tell you, only somebody said he'd met with a kind of an accident——."

"I see," Sterett nodded. "He went away from the restaurant after the scene, leaving Fannie Gillespie and Ward together there, didn't he?"

"I don't know where he went!" Eileen disclaimed hastily. "I heard Fannie ran off herself and left Frank sitting there alone and he seemed to be in a terrible rage! Real late, when he was supposed to be on the train going to Detroit, somebody I know saw him in Gilfay's, that place where all the sporting men go, and when they asked him why he was still in town he said he'd waited over

because there was something he had to 'tend to, and he said it in a nasty kind of way. I—I was told he did take an early train next morning, but you could find that out, Mr. Sterett; maybe you could find out, too, where he was during the time between.—I don't mean that any of my friends know, or told me, but it seemed to me somebody ought to just make sure. It was him Fannie was afraid of, not Mr. Jordan!"

"She told you all about her affair with Henry Jordan?" Sterett changed his line of inquiry abruptly.

"Oh, yes! Fannie told me everything, I guess." Eileen's tone was buoyant with relief and she chattered on: "I never could understand what she saw in him, but perhaps it was just because he was new, and then he'd passed her up for months there at Mrs. Horton's as if he didn't know she was alive and Fannie wasn't used to that; I shouldn't wonder if she made up her mind for fun to get him going and then fell for him herself for awhile."

"You knew what they eventually quarrelled over?" the attorney pursued.

"Because he——" Eileen glanced at Mrs. Horton and quickly amended her reply. "Because she was lively and liked parties and he didn't. She was crazy about dancing, not just sitting around holding hands, and she got tired, I guess. I knew about those notes he wrote her; she used to show them to me and we'd laugh over them—I mean, he was so preachy and fault-finding, as if she was married to him already, when that was the last thing she was thinking of! Still, I couldn't keep

quiet and let him face this when I knew about Frank Ward. I'd be scared something terrible to have him know I said it, but if any one broke in her room that night and killed Fannie, it was him!"

CHAPTER VIII

ARRAIGNED

MRS. HORTON settled herself firmly in her chair and gazed about the crowded courtroom with a grimly critical eye. Mrs. Moffat, who had returned for the early autumn stock of ladies' and misses' attire for Feingold's emporium, was seated beside her and a few rows behind Simeon Darley folded his new fawn-colored topcoat carefully over his plump knees and solemnly regarded the scene.

The district attorney had risen to address the grand jury and at his first crisply enunciated words Mrs. Moffat glanced at the prisoner. Henry Jordan was thinner and pallid, but it was not that which had drawn her attention repeatedly since his entrance; it was the look of stern maturity which this fortnight of suspense had graven on his features, robbing them of their last attribute of youth. She could scarcely believe that the man before her, embittered by this ordeal and worn with suffering, was the ambitious, buoyant lad of a few short weeks before, whom disappointment and the shattering of his fondest illusion had failed utterly to cast down. He seemed weary, with a curious air of detachment, as though he were merely a bored spectator instead of the

central figure in this portentous scene, whose freedom, perhaps ultimately life itself, depended on the decision of the thirty individuals before him, cast in such vastly dissimilar molds.

But District Attorney Harker's trenchant voice claimed Mrs. Moffat's ear at length. With a due regard for the dramatic he was extolling the beauty and virtues of the dead girl, picturing her as a simple little country maid, working industriously to earn her living and unmindful of her charm. Pursued by the attentions of her fellow boarder who had conceived a blind infatuation for her, she had at first consented to give him her companionship out of pity for the affection which she could not return, but when he demanded too much, when he insisted, accompanying his unwarranted claim by threats—as should be proven in good time to the gentlemen of the grand jury—when he attempted to coerce her into becoming his wife, linking her whole future with that of a man she did not love, then Frances Gillespie gently, compassionately, but firmly refused to make this stupendous, absurd sacrifice. With her refusal revenge entered the heart of the man seated before them and he resolved to take her life, that no other might ever find happiness with her. He described the supposititious murder with a wealth of graphic detail and wound up with a peroration painting Henry Jordan in the most lurid colors and likening him to the monsters of history.

When he had taken his seat once more Mrs. Moffat felt her eyes drawn yet again to the prisoner. He seemed scarcely to have heard the denunciation as he sat

staring straight before him with an odd tightening of the lines about his set mouth that might almost have been a shadow of a smile.

All at once memory carried her back to the night of her arrival in the previous month when he had taken her to that sensational screen drama of faithless love and murder, and afterward defended, or at least excused, the slayer. With startling distinctness his very words came again to her mind: "Maybe he thought he had a right to kill her, same as he'd throttle a wild beast if he had nothing else to kill it with but his bare hands, to keep it from harming other people as it had him. . . . I believe there's apt to come a time in any man's life when he'd like to kill . . . !"

Had he been perhaps unconsciously voicing his own sentiments? Was the thought already in his mind to take Fannie's life, not as the prosecutor declared, to prevent another from enjoying happiness with her, but as he himself had said of the pictured character: "Not for his own satisfaction but because he had a right, it would be better if she were dead!"

But even as his words had returned to cast a first, faint shadow of doubt upon him in her thoughts, so the look in his eyes, as for a moment he turned his head toward her, dispelled it. Deeply encircled and drawn with mental anguish, they were yet clear and steady, with no hint of fear or guilt in their calm, courageous glance. This boy could never, even in thought, have committed the hideous crime with which he was charged!

Officer Burke was the first witness to be examined,

and after the usual preliminaries the district attorney asked:

"Where were you at seven-thirty-five on the morning of May twentieth last?"

"Near the corner of Nint' Avenoo and Forty-eight' Street, patrolling my beat," the policeman answered promptly, in the sing-song accents of an oft-told story.

"Describe what occurred then."

"A woman came running up behind and grabbed me by the arm. 'Twas Agnes, that's been chambermaid and waitress for Mrs. Horton at Number Three-twenty-six A. since before ever I was detailed to that precinct. She was white as a sheet with a wild look in her eyes and says she: 'Come quick, Mr. Burke! There's something wrong!' 'And what is it?' says I, coming along just the same. 'I don't know, but Miss Gillespie's door has got to be broke down! 'Tis locked from the inside and she don't answer!' You hear the like of that from rooming houses more times than a few and I took it on the double-quick, her trailing after. When we got to Three-twenty-six A. the door was open and a young man I'd not seen before dashing down the steps. He yelled something about 'Doctor Vaughn' and I let him go, slamming the door and hurrying on up the stairs to the top floor, meeting no one on the way but Caroline, the cook, hollering in the hall. Mrs. Horton and another woman was holding on to each other on the top step of the last flight and Henry Jordan, with no coat nor collar on him, was leaning over the rail in the upper hall."

He paused, for a little stir had run around the court-

room at his mention of the prisoner's name, but the prosecutor carried him on.

"You know these people?"

"Yes, sir, all but the lady with Mrs. Horton, and her I'd seen there off and on for years back. I asked Mrs. Horton what was wrong and she said nothing, just pointed to the door of the little hall room at the rear. It was locked, all right, with the key turned in it from the other side so I broke it down, taking myself in with it. 'Twas dark, for though the window was open the shades had been pulled all the way down, but after a minute I made out a girl in a long, white nightgown hanging by a rope from the high, brass bedpost. It was Fannie Gillespie that I knew well, having seen her come and go from Mrs. Horton's for more than a year past."

He described Mrs. Horton's collapse, the return of the young man with the neighboring doctor, his own orders and message to the precinct station, while spectators and grand jury alike listened with absorbed attention. Then he was excused, giving place to Agnes.

The new witness was plainly nervous, but her sharp features bore a determined expression and she eyed the district attorney mutinously.

After drawing from her a corroboration of the policeman's testimony he asked:

"You'd waited on Miss Gillespie at the table and taken care of her room since she came to board at Mrs. Horton's?"

"Yes, sir."

“You also had charge of her mail and answered the telephone calls which came for her?”

"I did. She had lots of both, and my hands were full remembering the things to tell one gentleman and another." Agnes' nasal tones had quickened as though she feared an interruption but the prosecutor countered smoothly:

"Miss Gillespie was popular, you mean?"

“She’d always followers dangling after her and kept them going real smart and clever.”

It would have been impossible to tell from her tone whether she intended to convey admiration or censure, but the point told and the district attorney went on hastily :

"Miss Gillespie confided in you, then?"

"I've eyes in my head!" Agnes retorted, while a faint titter ran through the crowd of spectators. "There was no need of her telling me things."

The judge rebuked her sternly and then the prosecutor asked:

"Then did you observe when the prisoner at the bar began paying marked attention to Fannie Gillespie?"

Agnes nodded.

"Yes, sir. She'd been making eyes at him for months, but he couldn't see her, then all of a sudden he started taking her around and it was all up with him."

The tenor of her reply was unmistakable now and a wrangle ensued to have it stricken from the records, but it had registered, and when the prosecutor strove to establish personal animosity on Agnes' part toward the dead girl

he signally failed. She left the stand, a distinct feather in the cap of the accused and Dr. Vaughn was sworn in.

He recapitulated the incidents of the morning when the tragedy was discovered, detailing the obvious cause of death and approximate hour at which it had taken place, and then Sterett took him in hand.

"Doctor, have you ever in your professional capacity, encountered a death by hanging before?"

"Yes. Two of them, in fact." The doctor stroked his neatly clipped beard with flexible, tapering fingers.

"Were they suicides or murders?"

"Suicides, unquestionably. No doubt was entertained in either case."

"In your professional capacity, then, do you consider it likely or unlikely, possible or impossible, that a person could be forcibly taken from bed and hanged without the least disturbance or outcry which would reach some ears in a quiet, sleeping household?"

This time the roar of objection was sustained but the seed had been planted and as the occupants of the jury box glanced inadvertently at one another, Mrs. Horton nudged her neighbor again.

"Get that, Mis' Moffat? Fighting right from the start, ain't he? I guess there won't much pass by him!"

Mrs. Moffat nodded with her finger on her lips. She had lost the next name called, but the stocky, thickset, sandy-haired figure which mounted the stand was one she remembered. It was the detective from headquarters, Lieutenant Stevenson.

The spectators, too, evidently recalled his prominence

in the investigation when the case first reached the press, for a repressed murmur passed among them like a sibilant breeze, subsiding as the prosecutor began his questioning.

The detective described his examination of the room in which the girl had died and his discovery of the compromising letters which were submitted in evidence without protest from the defense. After whetting the curiosity of the grand jury the district attorney craftily left it unsatisfied and switched the topic to Stevenson's interview with the landlady; her admission that she could conceive no motive for suicide on Fannie Gillespie's part, her tribute to the girl's high moral character and general popularity, and account of her growing nervousness during the final weeks of her life culminating in the appearance of fear.

Mrs. Horton's broad face flushed and she compressed her lips when she heard herself quoted in the testimony, but the reference was soon concluded and, led by the prosecutor, Stevenson told of his survey of the roof, introducing in evidence also the rope which had suspended the body of Fannie Gillespie and the section of clothesline from which it had been severed.

"Did you observe anything else on the roof?" District Attorney Harker asked.

"Yes, sir. Footprints," replied the detective promptly.

"Were they those of a man or a woman?"

"A woman."

"Will you tell the court, Lieutenant Stevenson, how you came to this conclusion?"

"I found the shoe that had made them and proved its ownership."

There was a sudden stir far back among the spectators and Caroline, resplendent in a bright purple gown and feathered hat, started to rise from her chair, but feeling curious, alien eyes upon her she subsided.

"Do you recognize this shoe?" The prosecutor held up the large but dilapidated specimen of footwear which the witness had used in his investigation and the latter nodded.

"Yes, that's the one. I found it with its mate down in the back yard of Mrs. Horton's house and Agnes said it belonged to the cook, and that she wore them hanging out wash, there and on the roof. I took it up to the roof and found it fitted perfectly into the prints; the only prints there."

A low mutter came from the indignant owner of the shoe, but it was lost in the district attorney's next question.

"Were there any further indications on the roof?"

"None that I saw. I went from there down to the room in which the body was found."

He continued, describing its furnishings and the clothing and toilet articles with the most minute detail, as well as the contents of the trunk. When he came to the photographs they were admitted in evidence and at length the subject of the letters was broached again. With telling effect the prosecutor quoted from them, reading aloud to the grand jury the most damaging passages written by Henry Jordan in the first bitter moments

of his disillusionment, and although there was little outward manifestation of it the veering attitude of the men who sat in judgment could be almost felt.

Then Stevenson continued his story. Henry Jordan had admitted his infatuation for Fannie Gillespie, but only when he saw that denial would be useless; he had been confused when the notes were produced but confessed having written them, declaring that he had been "wild with jealousy and disappointment." He asked if he were being accused of her murder before the suggestion of it was made to him and did not deny it, merely reminding his questioner that the girl's door had been found locked on the inside; a trifling and irrelevant detail when entrance could have been as easily gained through the window.

In his ensuing examination of the witness, Sterett tried by every artifice to amend his former testimony so as to mitigate its damning force, but Stevenson was wary and not to be shaken and as he left the stand it was apparent that the authorities had indeed scored.

Then a name was called at which the listeners gazed questioningly at each other and Mrs. Horton grasped the arm of the buyer from Ohio in troubled amazement.

"Evelyn Trimble."

A pale, angular woman with smooth bands of fair hair under her plain hat repeated the oath in a calm, low voice which penetrated to the uttermost corner of the great room.

"What is your profession, Miss Trimble?" the district attorney queried with urbane courtesy.

"I am a graduate nurse."

"What in the world——?" Mrs. Horton began, but Mrs. Moffat silenced her.

"Were you actively employed on the nineteenth and twentieth of last May?"

"Yes, sir. From the first to the twenty-eighth on a pneumonia case."

"Where?"

"At Number Three-twenty-seven B. West Forty-seventh Street." The reply came with quiet precision but the effect on several of her hearers was significant.

"That's just back of us!" Mrs. Horton exclaimed in an irrepressible whisper. "What on earth can she know about this?"

"Were you on day or night duty, Miss Trimble?"

"Night duty, sir. My hours were from eight to eight."

"Where was your patient's room located?" The prosecutor's tones were bland.

"On the third floor, at the rear of the house; a private bath adjoined, also looking out on the rear."

"The view from the windows of your patient's room and that of the bath was of the back yards?"

"And the backs of the houses on the south side of Forty-eighth Street," Miss Trimble nodded, and added: "The rear of Number Three-twenty-six A. was directly opposite."

The purport of the questioning was apparent now to the spectators and again they stirred expectantly, but the district attorney continued without pause:

"Were you in the habit of glancing from these windows?"

"Occasionally, when my patient did not require my attention."

"Did you notice any particular window more than others?"

"Yes. The single one on the extreme right of the top floor of Number Three-twenty-six A.—my right as I faced it, I mean," the witness explained. "I was curious about it for there was a light there almost constantly."

"Did you observe it on the night of the nineteenth and twentieth of last May?"

"I did. The window was open but the white shade drawn and the light on at eight o'clock when I came on duty. At nine when I gave my patient a stimulant I noticed from the bathroom where I rinsed the spoon that the light was out in the room opposite, but at eleven when I administered an opiate it had been turned on again and a figure was plainly outlined against the shade." Miss Trimble paused and added: "It was that of a woman in profile with both arms raised, removing her hat; a small woman very slender and girlish. I had seen it nearly every evening in that room since I went on the case."

"Please tell the gentlemen of the jury if you noted anything else that night?"

"Nothing for more than two hours. My patient was restless and demanded my attention constantly, but at twenty minutes past one I went into the bathroom once

more to heat some milk. I remember the time because I noted it on my chart. The milk bottle was in a small ice chest under the window and as I removed it I glanced out and up to that opposite window. At that instant the light there was extinguished."

"Did you consider that worthy of note?"

"Yes, because the light was frequently out until that hour or even later, but from whatever time it was lighted, when the evening was far advanced until morning between seven and eight o'clock, that light was always there. It was never put out, never on one single night!"

CHAPTER IX

THE CASE AGAINST HENRY

WHEN the trained nurse made her curious announcement in an unemotional, positive tone there was an instant of silence and then a murmur arose, but the sharp beat of the gavel from the bench broke in upon it, and it died away in a stillness so profound that the very air seemed to vibrate.

The effect upon the grand jury had been scarcely less significant than on the spectators, but the accused man betrayed the most marked reaction. His whole body straightened and bent forward slowly, his pale face still leaden and as rigid as though carved in stone, but his haggard eyes seemed to bore into those of the woman on the witness stand with a tense, eager questioning in their depths.

"That room was invariably illuminated from late in the evening until after daylight?"

"Yes. On a few occasions it was not extinguished from the time I came on duty till I left, but invariably there was a light there later, whether the room had been dark earlier or not."

"Thank you." The prosecutor nodded and turned with a slight smile to Lockwood Sterett.

"Miss Trimble," began the attorney as he rose. "You are positive of the date of this occurrence?"

"Yes. When I read the afternoon papers and realized the young woman's death must have taken place in that room it was naturally impressed upon my memory."

"You were certain of the number of the house and the location of the room?"

"The newspapers described that and when I returned to my case that evening I was curious enough to walk past the house on Forty-eighth Street, counting the numbers from the corner," she responded. "I had just put on my uniform when a man called to interview the members of the household and I was summoned. It was a detective from headquarters; the one who has testified before you now. I told him what I have just repeated."

"Had you spoken about the light happening to have been extinguished in that room the night before to anyone else previous to that moment?" Sterett put the question without seeming to choose his words deliberately, but a slight frown appeared on Miss Trimble's forehead.

"I mentioned having seen the light go out to the parlor-maid who admitted me to the house," she replied with emphasis. "It was when she asked if I had heard what happened."

"Did she ask if you had heard of a murder?" he demanded quickly.

The nurse shook her head.

"No, if I had heard of the young woman's suicide there. It was not until the morning papers appeared

next day that we learned an arrest had been made on suspicion."

Noon recess was announced as Sterett excused her, and Mrs. Horton repaired with her companion to a small restaurant nearby, where after giving their order a troubled silence fell between them. The landlady was the first to break it.

"I don't believe that light being put out means anything, though Fannie did seem to keep the gas on the whole blessed night!" she exclaimed. "That nurse was only trying to make herself important. I never had one under my roof yet that wasn't more nuisance, one way or another, than the whole houseful of boarders, and talk the legs off an iron pot, besides! Mis' Moffat, how does it look to you; for Henry, I mean? Do you think Mr. Sterett's going to have a hard time getting him off?"

"It's too early to say, now," Mrs. Moffat replied evasively. "He hasn't begun his side of the hearing yet, you know, and he may have witnesses we haven't heard of."

"Like the way the district attorney sprung that woman just now?" Mrs. Horton nodded, smiling suddenly to herself. "I shouldn't wonder if he did pull something the authorities wasn't looking for! Still, to anybody not knowing Henry and just taking what's been brought out so far it looks bad—or would if Fannie had actually been murdered, which ain't possible!"

She paused, thinking again of Eileen Gaffney's story about Ward, the race driver, and a shudder passed through her corpulent frame. She had considered him

merely as another victim of Fannie's coquetry who might just as reasonably be suspected by the police as Henry, but equally innocent. Could he actually have broken in her house that night?

What use had Sterett made of the information given him by Eileen? Mrs. Horton had seen him but rarely since, and he had vouchsafed nothing as to the course he meant to pursue. Had he been in touch with Eileen again to coach her if she should be called upon to testify?

As the question entered her mind it brought a new train of thought which she voiced aloud.

"I just can't believe there was anybody there, Mis' Moffat, but I'll likely be called to the stand myself this afternoon; at least, Mr. Sterett said the last time I saw him that they'd want my testimony very early in the proceedings. I was all fixed to tell that grand jury a few things it wouldn't hurt 'em to know, but he said I was only to answer questions and try not to show whether I was for or against Henry; that it would hurt and not help him if I did. I guess he knows his business, but it's going to be mighty hard!"

The ordeal came sooner than she had expected, for barely had court opened for the afternoon session when she heard her name rapped out in the clerk's loud, peremptory tones and, not trusting herself to glance toward the prisoner or his attorney, she took the stand.

With Lockwood Sterett's instructions in mind she met the gaze of the prosecutor almost affably as he rose.

"What is your full name?"

"Julia Louise Horton, born Fleming." She drew a deep breath.

"You conduct a boarding-house at Number Threewentysix West Forty-eighth Street, this city?"

"Yes."

"Fannie Gillespie was a guest of yours for fourteen months prior to her death?"

"Yes."

"When was the last time you saw her alive?"

"Just after dinner the night before—the nineteenth. I met her in the hall as she was going out."

"Alone?"

"Yes." Mrs. Horton opened her lips as though to amplify her statement and then thought better of it.

"Did she say where she was going?"

"For a dance with one of her gentlemen friends; she didn't tell me which one, nor where she was going to meet him."

"Do you know when she returned?"

"No, but it was around eleven or maybe a little before; there was a light in her room between eleven and twelve. Then I went to bed."

"What was the first you knew of her murder?"

"I don't know it yet." Her voice was still calmly unruffled and her expression mild. "I don't know as there was any murder."

"Well, then, what was the first you knew that something was wrong?" The district attorney smiled indulgently but his eyes hardened.

"When Agnes knocked on my door while I was getting

dressed and told me she couldn't get any answer from Fannie. I went up myself and called and pounded, but it wasn't any use."

"So you sent for a police officer? Why did you do that, Mrs. Horton? Did you suspect that a crime had been committed?"

"Not murder!" she declared quickly. "I knew Fannie must be in and I thought she'd been took sick or maybe even died sudden in the night, though there wasn't anything the matter with her that I knew of. I'd never had a mite of trouble in all the twenty years I been taking boarders, but just the same I made up my mind it'd be a good thing to have somebody around when that door was opened!"

"You have heard the testimony of Officer Burke; is it correct in every particular?"

It was the question for which Mrs. Horton had waited and her lips relaxed from their unusual tension.

"He didn't say that it was him told us what had happened in there."

She paused and the prosecutor prompted her.

"Go on! What did he tell you?"

"That Fannie had killed herself."

A low murmur broke out once more, but it was quelled by the district attorney's voice.

"Officer Burke said that? What were his exact words, do you recall them?"

"He said: 'Holy Saints! She's done the Dutch!' I don't know what happened then; I fainted dead away and when I come to I was in my own room."

Urged by searching questions she recounted the further incidents of the morning culminating in the departure of Henry Jordan with the detective.

"Lieutenant Stevenson has testified that you told him no possible cause existed for suicide on Fanny Gillespie's part. Do you recall that statement, Mrs. Horton?"

"I recall *not* making it!" she retorted with spirit. "I said there wasn't any reason why she should kill herself as far as I knew, and there wasn't!"

"Yet according to your statement to Lieutenant Stevenson you noticed during the last few weeks of Fannie Gillespie's life that she was in fear of something," the prosecutor persisted. "Didn't you speak to her about it?"

"No. I thought she was just nervous from the rush of work at the store and then going out so much, too. It never came to me that she might be scared of anything till I got telling Mr. Stevenson about it after she was dead."

"What did you believe her to be afraid of?"

Mrs. Horton flushed.

"Nothing! It was the detective put that idea in my head, himself!"

That ended her testimony for the prosecutor and after a few general questions he turned her over to the counsel for the prisoner without having once mentioned the accused man, and Lockwood Sterett seized upon the opportunity to turn it to his instant advantage. With care not to reveal her ingenious partisanship too palpably to the jury he obtained from her a glowing tribute to

Henry Jordan's character and steadiness of purpose, and then asked abruptly :

"Mrs. Horton, what did you know of the attachment between Fannie Gillespie and Henry Jordan?"

"Nothing that either of them told me," she responded. "It was just as I said to the detective, I did think he cared an awful lot for her 'long in the winter and she seemed to like him, too, though not so much as he did her. Anyways, she stopped going 'round with other fellers for a while, but all of a sudden she started again and he sort of went back to the way he'd been before he met her, up to his neck in business by day and working on his invention at night. I didn't hear of any quarrel between 'em, and they always spoke real friendly when they met in the hall or at meals."

"Detective Lieutenant Stevenson has testified you told him the girl, Fannie Gillespie, grew increasingly nervous prior to her death and you corroborated this just now." Sterett paused as though in warning and Mrs. Horton took a fresh grip upon herself, conscious of Henry Jordan's shadowed eyes upon her. "How did this nervousness manifest itself?"

"She was awful restless," Mrs. Horton began. "Never still, it seemed like, and if she happened to sit with her back to an open door or window I noticed she kept twisting to look behind her."

As she paused for breath Sterett interrupted quickly.

"When the defendant was in the same room, where she could see him without turning? Think, Mrs. Horton; this is important."

The admonition was intended for the benefit of the grand jury, but the witness accepted it in good faith.

"I don't need to think, for it was mostly in the dining room I noticed it and Henry Jordan always sat right across the table, facing her, while the door was just back of her and the basement window at one side; she kept looking from one to the other of 'em, but more often the window."

Mrs. Moffat, listening, remembered that look as she had herself observed it at dinner the night of her arrival, and with the thought there came another, later memory. It startled her so that she was oblivious to the next question from Sterett and only returned to the present when Mrs. Horton spoke again.

"Yes. When Fannie went to work mornings she'd look up and down the block first from the vestibule door and then hurry to the cars as though somebody was after her——!"

"I object!" The voice of the district attorney cut sharply in upon her. "I object to the witness' statement of theory, and I ask that it be stricken from the records!"

"Objection sustained." Judge Carberry, presiding, nodded his gray head. "Do not qualify the facts by any suppositions of your own."

Mrs. Horton flushed crimson once more and bit her lip, but counsel for the defense asked encouragingly:

"You saw Fannie Gillespie look first from the door before she hurried to the cars?"

"Yes. Whenever I happened to be around at the time

she started for the store." Mrs. Horton's tones were low but undaunted.

"Do you know whether or not the defendant was still in the house on those occasions?"

"Oh, yes! She knew he never left for business until half an hour later."

"That is all, thank you." Sterett seated himself and Mrs. Horton, at a nod from the clerk, returned to her place beside Mrs. Moffat, but the latter gave her only an absent-minded glance.

A stranger succeeded her when the name Benjamin Newell was called. He was in the late twenties, with sleek, dark hair and a blatantly striped suit that fitted his narrow-shouldered frame with pitiless perfection. His manner was the aggressively cheerful, brisk one of the professional showman and he described himself in loud and satisfied accents as the owner of the 'Avalanche Ride,' the biggest money-maker at Knickerbocker Beach.

He had known Fannie Gillespie for several months and taken her out a lot; she was a little queen, all right, pretty and a swell dresser and good company, but there wasn't any nonsense between them. He wasn't the kind to fall hard for any dame; they was just friends. The last time he saw her alive was on Wednesday night, the eighteenth of May; he took her to a show and then for a dance and a bite to the Venetian Gardens, leaving her at her boarding-house a little after one o'clock.

She seemed to be in her usual spirits, but at supper she acted kind of troubled and finally told him that a

guy she had broken with didn't take it right and she was getting worried for fear he'd do something crazy. She didn't say who the guy was and he didn't ask; he didn't think much about it till he read what had happened to her and it almost knocked him cold, for she'd made a date to come down to the Beach again the next Sunday—she had been down the previous one—and she sure hadn't any notion of killing herself, that he could swear.

"You are positive Fannie did not mention the man's name?" Sterett asked when the witness had been relinquished to him.

"Positive!"

"That is all."

Eileen Gaffney was the next to be put on the stand, and throughout the district attorney's questioning she kept her eyes fixed on the counsel for the defense, but her testimony merely evinced further proof of Fannie Gillespie's popularity and love of amusement. Incidentally it revealed her own point of view in regard to the affair between the dead girl and Henry Jordan.

"Did Fannie Gillespie tell you why she quarrelled with the defendant?" Sterett rose in his turn.

"Oh, yes! He wasn't a spender and Fannie liked the high spots," Eileen replied candidly. "Then, he wanted to be engaged right away and she couldn't see it, not being tied for ever so long with no prospect of the kind of a home she'd want, and anyhow she hadn't any idea of settling down."

"Did she ever tell you, subsequent to their quarrel, that she was worried, or afraid of Henry Jordan?"

Eileen shrugged until her imitation fox scarf touched her hat brim.

"She never even spoke about him!" Her tone was deprecating and she flushed as she glanced quickly at the prisoner's set, unseeing eyes. "I don't remember her mentioning his name at all."

This concluded her testimony and as the afternoon advanced she was followed on the stand by another young saleslady from Louisette's who told of her friendship with the dead girl, and, led by the prosecutor, she related an incident in the cloakroom of the shop on the morning of the day before Fannie Gillespie was found hanging to her bedpost.

"She was fixing her hair up high, the way Louisette made her wear it to try on hats; all of us were there except Miss Gaffney, and she's generally late." The girl was telling her story with morbid relish, cognizant of her fleeting moment in the spotlight. "We were talking about our gentlemen friends and all at once Miss Gillespie said she had one that she wished she'd never seen. She said she used to be kind of crazy about him but now he just made her tired and she couldn't stand him. She didn't tell us his name, but he'd turned nasty and threatened her."

"Did Fannie Gillespie say what this man had threatened to do?" the district attorney asked. "Can you recall her exact words?"

"I should say I can! She said he'd threatened to kill her if she wouldn't marry him and he was the strong, quiet kind who meant it!" The witness paused with a

shudder and then went on: "She said,—'Don't be surprised, girls, if you hear something's happened to me! I've got a feeling that he's going to get me yet!'"

The members of the grand jury were leaning forward eagerly with their eyes fixed upon the girl on the stand, and an answering shudder seemed to sweep through the thronged courtroom as the prosecutor turned to his colleague, the attorney for the accused. Mrs. Horton's glance travelled swiftly, too, to Lockwood Sterett, but to her consternation he merely shook his head.

A low buzz of comment like a mighty swarming of bees zoomed on the air to be abruptly silenced by the district attorney's trenchant announcement:

"The State has no further witness to examine."

CHAPTER X

OPENED BATTERIES

DINNER that night was a distinct failure at Mrs. Horton's boarding-house, but no one noticed that the mutton was underdone, the potatoes scorched, and the cherry pie a soggy, leaden mass. The food would have been scarcely touched in any case, for Myrtle Harris was too avidly curious as to the day's proceedings to eat, Edgar North was out, and Marian Gray, the latest guest, sat looking the questions she was too tactful to utter.

"He just seemed like a graven image!" Mrs. Horton wiped away a furtive tear as she replied to a query of Myrtle. "You'd have thought he'd been dead and buried himself! No wonder they call that place the 'Tombs'! He didn't act as if he even heard what was going on except once, when that nurse was telling about the light going out in poor Fannie's room!"

"Her story is in the evening papers," Myrtle nodded. "They seem to think it'll go against Henry Jordan, sure!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" the landlady retorted with a sudden return of her old vigor. "There's nothing in the world that'll make 'em indict Henry, but they're making

it all out worse'n I ever dreamed they could! What do you think, Mr. Darley?"

"It ought to be proved conclusively that the poor, dear child killed herself or that some one else did it," Simeon Darley shook his head weightily. "Otherwise, even if Henry isn't indicted, it will stand against him for the rest of his life."

Mrs. Moffat took no part in the conversation. She sat staring at her plate, her forehead furrowed with thought, and the humorous quirk of her lips set in a straight, unyielding line. With the conclusion of the pretense at a meal, however, the frown had disappeared, and when a little later Mrs. Horton went to her room for a talk she found it empty.

"Where was you last night?" the landlady asked as they set out together for the Court of General Sessions the next morning. "I looked for you, but you must've got in real late."

"I did." There was an oddly repressed note in the voice of the buyer from Ohio. "There was something I had to attend to, even at the last minute.—District Attorney Harker closed the presentation of the evidence in almost record time, didn't he?"

"Well, he called everybody he could think of except Caroline's cat!" Mrs. Horton did not note the quick change of topic. "I wonder who Mr. Sterett will bring forward? I've got a kind of an idea, but maybe there's more up his sleeve that I don't know about. I hope so, for Henry's sake; that grand jury looked, when court adjourned yesterday, as though they'd a'ready made up

what minds they've got that he was guilty, without waiting to hear his side of it. Mr. Sterett didn't act as if the nurse's story about the gas was any blow to him, though; I'd like to know what he's got to offset it."

Her question was answered in part immediately after court opened, when the counsel for the prisoner called his first witness, and she was all but stupefied with astonishment at hearing the name of her senior boarder.

"Simeon Darley."

A sartorial wonder in a high-waisted suit of bottle green, Simeon rose and came forward, taking the oath with vast dignity and importance.

"Where were you, Mr. Darley, on the evening of the seventeenth of May, last?"

"At Scully's gymnasium, from eight-thirty till ten-thirty," the witness replied promptly. "After that I played a little pool downstairs and got home to Mrs. Horton's at about eleven-thirty."

"That was Tuesday evening?"

"Tuesday, yes."

"Did you see any one you knew on your way home?"

"Not until I turned the corner of Forty-eighth Street. Then I saw Mrs. Moffat, a guest who had just arrived that afternoon, walking ahead of me with Henry Jordan. I entered the house right behind them."

"Did they speak to you?"

"Neither of them saw me. They said 'good night' in the hall and Mrs. Moffat went to her room on the second floor, but Henry Jordan stopped to hunt for some matches on the hall table and I asked him to come up to my room

for a smoke. He did, and we talked for a long time. It was after three when he left me."

"Do you remember the conversation?"

"Not all of it," Simeon paused. "We talked about a great many things; his invention and our summer vacation plans, and then things of general interest."

"You say that it was after three when the defendant left you. Do you know this positively?"

"Yes, for I looked at my watch, as I wound it immediately after he had gone, and it hasn't gained or lost a minute in years. It was twenty past three." There was a note of conscious pride in Simeon's tones.

"So that the defendant was with you in your room from shortly before midnight until twenty minutes after three in the morning?"

"He was."

"Thank you, that will do," Sterett turned with a bow to the surprised district attorney who arose but contented himself with a few perfunctory questions as to the witness' own friendship with the dead girl, and his observation of the attachment which had formerly existed between her and Henry Jordan. The replies were negligible and Simeon stepped smugly down from the stand.

"Mrs. Elizabeth Moffat."

Mrs. Horton gave an audible gasp of surprise as her companion rose and advanced quietly.

"What is your business, Mrs. Moffat?" Sterett asked when the oath had been administered.

"I am buyer for Feingold & Son, of Columbia, Ohio," she replied in a clear, steady voice.

"When were you here on your last trip?"

"In May. I arrived on the seventeenth, and went to Mrs. Horton's, as I have done for years."

"You know the defendant?"

"Very well. I met him at Mrs. Horton's nearly three years ago and he has been there during each of my semi-annual visits since."

"Where did you go on the evening of the seventeenth?"

"To a motion picture with Mr. Jordan. We stopped for a soda afterward and returned to the boarding-house between half-past eleven and twelve o'clock. I thanked him and retired immediately to my room, which is on the second floor, front."

"You went to sleep at once?"

"No, not for several hours. I was nervous from the effect of the long train journey and anxious about some details of the business that had brought me to New York."

"Did you hear any sound outside your room?"

"Yes. Another woman guest came in and passed my door, going on upstairs; I recognized her step and the scent of the perfume I had noticed upon her at dinner. Then a church clock a block or so away struck twelve, and after that I heard nothing more but the striking of that clock for two hours. Just after two the front door closed again very softly and lighter footsteps passed my door. I recognized them, too; it was the only other woman guest at the house, Miss Gillespie. Right after that I heard a taxi start from a few doors down the street and go away."

"Was that all you heard?"

"All I heard, yes, except the ordinary street sounds at night, but I was provoked with myself because I could not sleep and that taxi had scarcely reached the corner when I got up, put on a robe, and went to the window. At first the street seemed to be quite deserted and then all at once I saw a man lurking in the areaway just opposite; his face was turned toward me, a white blur in the shadows. He was watching our house."

Mrs. Moffat paused and involuntarily her glance rested for a moment on the prisoner. He was leaning slightly forward in his chair, gazing at her with the same fixed intensity of questioning as he had shown when the nurse testified on the previous day, but now there was a faint flush on his drawn face and a light in his eyes that had not been there before.

A stir of latent excitement ran through the courtroom and Sterett asked:

"Did you see this man move?"

"Only about the area. I watched until he drew back into the deeper shadows and disappeared."

"This was after two o'clock in the morning?"

"Between two and half-past. I watched the man across the street for ten or fifteen minutes and then, when I decided that he must have gone, I went back to bed. The church clock struck the half-hour and that was the last I heard before I fell asleep."

The purpose of this line of inquiry was plain at last and as it dawned fully upon the minds of the spectators the counsel for the prisoner switched it abruptly.

"Were you well acquainted with Miss Fannie Gillespie?"

"Yes. I had met her on two previous visits to Mrs. Horton's."

"What was your first conversation with her after your arrival last May?"

"She greeted me when she returned from work that afternoon. She told me of her change of employment; that was all."

"Did you talk with her again?"

"Only the general conversation at the table, until Thursday afternoon."

"Did you notice any change in her manner from your previous visits?"

"Yes. It was apparent at dinner the first evening."

"Will you describe this change?" Sterett's tones deepened.

"She talked and laughed in a forced, unnatural way and kept twitching about nervously and watching the area window, at the end of the dining-room. This was not so noticeable at breakfast the next morning, but it was at dinner again, and each night following."

"When did you have your next talk with Fannie Gillespie?"

"Late on Thursday afternoon. I invited her to my room and gave her a box of candy which had been sent to me."

"Mrs. Moffat, will you repeat what you can recall of the conversation?"

"She talked about dress and 'parties' and her distaste

for work. I mentioned marriage, but she said she was having too good a time to think of that for ages yet."

"Did Fannie Gillespie say anything about her plans for that evening?"

"Yes. She said she was going to dance with an auto race driver whom she didn't care for any more, but he was leaving the city on the midnight train." Mrs. Moffat replied without hesitation as though the query were anticipated and Mrs. Horton gasped again. So this had all been fixed! Her boarder must have gone to Sterett the night before!

"Was the defendant mentioned?" the counsel for the prisoner went on.

"Yes. I spoke of him and Miss Gillespie said he was a 'dear' and she used to be crazy about him, but he was dreadfully serious and didn't know what it was to have a good time. That was all."

"Did you hold any further conversation with her?"

"Yes. She returned at half-past ten that night and I heard her sob in the hall. I opened my door and asked what was the matter and she came in and told me." Mrs. Moffat related faithfully what had taken place between her and the girl now dead, and when she concluded a buzz of comment arose from all sides but it was quelled quickly as Sterett relinquished her to the examination of the authorities.

It was merely a perfunctory attempt to unsettle her certainty about the man in the opposite areaway and as she took her seat, Mrs. Horton turned to her reproachfully.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she whispered. "Why didn't you ever say anything about that man? Maybe he'd followed Fannie home, maybe he was that 'Frank'!"

"Jack Rogers!" the clerk called, and from the far back of the courtroom a slim, elegant young man came forward. His blond hair was parted in the middle, his trousers beautifully creased, and he carried himself with studied aplomb.

Describing himself as an artist of the screen drama, he admitted that he had greatly admired Miss Gillespie; she had accompanied him to a ball at Brewster Hall on the evening of the seventeenth and he had brought her home in a taxi just after two in the morning. Miss Gillespie had been in the best of spirits and seemed perfectly happy.

"Was that the last time you saw her alive?" Sterett inquired.

"No. I was at a table in the Jazz-way restaurant with some leading members of my profession on Thursday evening, the nineteenth." Mr. Rogers shot his cuffs and gazed complacently out over the head of the attorney. "Miss Gillespie came in with a man I did not know, but she bowed to me as they took a table, so I went over and greeted her. She introduced me to the person with her; his name was Frank Ward. I invited her to dance and the fellow made no objection; in fact we danced together several times and all at once he became infuriated and made an impossible scene!"

The slight lisp was in droll contrast to his shocked accents and Sterett asked quickly:

"What did he say?"

"I really can't remember.—I withdrew!" He examined the shining gloss on his nails critically.

"Where did you go?"

"To the Monks' Club. I remained there until after midnight and then started for home."

"Did you reach there without incident, Mr. Rogers?"

The young man blinked and his long, curling lashes swept his cheeks, in which a dull flush rose slowly. Then he smiled.

"Ah, you mean the motor accident which the press made such a sensation out of?"

"I mean what really happened to you, Mr. Rogers!" Sterett retorted. "May I remind you that you are under oath?"

The flush deepened in the witness' smooth cheeks.

"And if I decline to answer?" He glanced uncertainly at the grave countenances of the grand jury and, reading no help there, he exclaimed in an injured tone: "I am not responsible for the version of the matter given out by my press agent! I was waylaid and assaulted as I reached the door of my apartment house—assaulted painfully by the ruffian, Frank Ward!"

"He gave you no opportunity to defend yourself?"

"I am not a pugilist!" The retort caused a wave of amusement through the courtroom and the witness glared angrily. "I attempted to remonstrate with him, but it was impossible. I was thrown to the sidewalk and unmercifully pummelled, suffering injuries which caused me to remain in retirement for some time and compelled

me to lose a valuable contract. I discovered subsequently that the fellow got out of town on the earliest train in the morning and has not returned since."

He added the last sentence loftily with an obvious renewal of his self-esteem.

"When did you learn of Miss Gillespie's death?"

"From the afternoon papers. I was shocked, horribly! I could conceive of no reason for her suicide, yet I cannot conceive that any one would have wished for her death!"

CHAPTER XI

THE GRAND JURY DECIDES

“FRANK WARD.”

The first witness of the afternoon session, who came forward with quick, firm strides, was tall and loose-limbed, with fiery black eyes and black hair falling in a long lock over his forehead. His nose was aquiline, his mouth set and hard, and he thrust out his prominent jaw as he eyed the counsel for the prisoner, who asked the preliminary questions and then plunged into his subject.

“You knew Fannie Gillespie?”

“I’ll say I did!” The words were rough and his tone bitter, but anguish looked from his eyes and there was pathos in his twisted smile. “I fell for her hard! I was going to quit the racing game last summer, but as soon as I began talking about a garage on the Post Road and a little cottage she threw me cold!”

Instructed sternly to keep to literal replies to the questions put to him, the grimness deepened in his face and his expression grew even more sullen.

“You say that Fannie Gillespie refused you last summer,” counsel for the prisoner went on. “How was it that you were much in her company during March, April, and May of this year?”

"Because I met her again in February."

"You resumed your former relations?"

"She turned to me again for excitement because I was handy—and easy!" the witness replied through set teeth.

"Will you describe the extent of your friendship during this period?" Sterett asked.

"I didn't get wise that she was only using me till about a month before I was going to Detroit, and it was just hell right up to—to the night of the nineteenth of May."

His voice had grown more low and now it faltered and stopped. Henry Jordan was regarding him fixedly and there was dead silence throughout the courtroom.

"Did you ever threaten her?"

Abruptly the prisoner laughed.

"I did! I wouldn't have hurt her, though!"

"Did you tell Fannie Gillespie you would fix her so that nobody else would want to go out with her?"

"Yes!"

"On another occasion when you had discovered her deceiving you, did you say she ought to have the lie choked back down her throat?"

"Yes!" Ward threw back his head. "I'm not trying to deny it, nor that I beat up that movie pretty-boy for butting in on our last night together! Afterwards I went to Gilfay's and left about one o'clock."

"What did you do until morning?" Sterett persisted.

"I walked!" the witness declared tersely. "I found myself up in the Bronx around five o'clock, dead tired, but easier in my mind than I'd been for months because I'd made up my mind to cut her out."

"What happened after you made this decision?"

"I got a fresh grip on myself and hurried back to my hotel to grab my things and beat it for the Detroit train; there was just time."

"When did you first learn of Fannie Gillespie's death?"

"A day or two later when I got hold of a New York paper."

Ward paused with a choke in his voice and Sterett took up a different line.

"Where were you on Tuesday night, the seventeenth of last May?"

"Out in my car. I ran to Greenwich and back, and I didn't get in till around three in the morning."

"Did you stop anywhere?"

"No. Just traveled."

"You were alone?"

"Yes."

"What time did you leave the garage with your car that evening?"

"Not till around eleven."

"So that from eleven till half-past three you were alone in your car, just traveling?"

"That's right!" Ward nodded, and that all but ended his testimony, for the district attorney had only one question to put to him when his turn came.

"Mr. Ward, from your knowledge of Frances Gillespie's character, are you of the opinion that she committed suicide?"

"Not in a million years!" came the emphatic answer.

"She hadn't a reason in the world and nobody loved life and good times more than she did!"

The witness who followed him was of vastly different caliber. Slender and white-haired, with a gentle manner and mild, fatherly voice, he gave his name as Pitt Marlow, head of the firm of Marlow Brothers, manufacturers of fireproof office furniture and employers of Henry Jordan since he left school.

He testified to the young man's character in the most glowing terms and then the clerk of the court called:

"Henry Jordan!"

Henry rose slowly as though impelled by some power beyond his own volition and made his way to the witness stand, as unconscious of the guard who walked beside him as he was of the throng of faces turned toward him, the scores of eyes fastened upon his erect but almost pathetically youthful figure. From the moment of his arraignment, his reactions had been those of a man seeking to throw off the thralldom of a hideous nightmare. This could not be he, facing the possibility of trial for his life! Fannie Gillespie was not dead!

He took the oath in a low, steady tone, and the perfunctory queries as to his age, birthplace, and employment having been made, Lockwood Sterett paused, glanced about the courtroom, and then back to his client.

"Mr. Jordan, I am going to ask you to tell the court exactly how you felt toward Fannie Gillespie, from the beginning of your acquaintanceship with her until the moment of the discovery of her death."

A subdued, multisonous murmur passed through the

crowd and Henry drew a deep breath. The moment had come!

"I was introduced to Fannie Gillespie when she came to board with Mrs. Horton fourteen months before her death and I admired her greatly. Late last summer I began paying her attention and before I realized it she knew that I—cared for her and she gave me to understand that she cared, too."

He paused and the attorney prompted him.

"In so many definite words?"

"Oh, yes!" Henry found his voice again. "We talked about the future; looking back, though, I suppose I did most of the talking and planning, and she just listened, but I didn't notice her lack of response then. Meanwhile I was spending all I had saved in giving her the good times she was accustomed to, and she kept wanting more and more. At last, in February, things came to a showdown. She wouldn't be engaged to me and stop going around with other men, and I was nearly at the end of my savings. Then she showed me the truth, that there wasn't to be any future for us together; there never would have been from the beginning. She hadn't ever meant to marry me!

"I was almost crazy for awhile and I wrote her a couple of pretty desperate notes—the ones read in court here, and that the detective testified about. I put them in the vase in the hall where we used to exchange messages. They didn't make any difference, though, and I had to realize it was all over! It wasn't her fault at all, it was mine! She had only taken what I offered,

and if she let me believe what wasn't so,—well, I ought to have known better than ever to think of it in the first place. She wasn't to blame!"

"Yet you didn't feel that way when you wrote the letters?"

"I was too excited, too wretched, to think! I felt like going out and smashing something!" For an instant the haggard eyes burned and he clenched his hands. Then he relaxed slowly. "I hadn't the least notion of doing any harm, I was just like a man in such pain that he beats his head against the wall!"

"How long were you in this mood?"

"Only for a little while. My feelings changed."

"When did this change come about?"

"Very soon. Quicker than I knew it myself. I sort of woke up. I still had my work and the future, everything that had made me contented before I ever saw her."

Henry straightened as though a burden had dropped from his shoulders. The story had been told! They must believe him!

"Do you recall the night of the nineteenth of May?" Sterett put the question with a change of tone.

"Yes," responded Henry. "After dinner I went out and strolled around until nearly midnight, and even then when I came home I wasn't tired enough to sleep for I was worried."

"What were you worried about?"

"I'd only learned that day about a patent that seemed to be on the same basic principle as the invention I had

been trying to perfect for more than a year. That night I walked up and down for more than an hour in my room. Finally I went to bed, and the next thing I knew it was morning and somebody was crying hysterically upstairs."

"That was the first thing you were conscious of after you retired the night before?"

"Yes," Henry nodded. "I looked at the watch under my pillow; it was twenty minutes after seven, I remember. Miss Harris has the room directly over mine and I thought she must be ill and need a doctor. I dressed, all but my collar and coat, and opened the door. Then 'way overhead from the top floor I heard a pounding and Mrs. Horton's voice calling out distractedly, and I rushed up. She was beating on Fannie Gillespie's door and crying to her to open it! I tried the knob and called, too, but I got no response and Mrs. Horton said she had sent for a policeman. Officer Burke came and broke down the door, and I was just at his heels as he entered. I—saw her hanging there!"

He paused once more, shuddering, but Sterett would not allow the tension to drop.

"Did you think she had been murdered?"

The district attorney objected, but without avail.

"No!" Henry exclaimed vehemently. "There wasn't any question in my mind but that it was suicide! I vowed I'd find out if anybody had driven her to it and make them pay, but the detective found those notes I'd written to her and before I knew it I was under arrest, charged with murder!"

"Mr. Jordan." The attorney's voice held a note of profound gravity. "Do you solemnly swear that you know nothing of Fannie Gillespie's death? Do you swear that you are innocent, so help you God?"

"I do!" Low and shaking with emotion the reply came. "I had not been up to the top floor in months until I heard Mrs. Horton's voice there that morning! I saw Fannie Gillespie leave the dining-room after dinner the night before and the next time I laid eyes upon her was when I followed the policeman into her room and saw her body hanging from the bedpost. I swear it! I swear before God that I know nothing of her death, I am innocent!"

His voice rang out with passionate earnestness in which there was no hint of entreaty. He did not plead for belief, he stated a solemn truth with the seeming faith that it would carry its own conviction, and a wave of emotion swept the spectators.

Before it reached hysteria, however, the presiding judge's gavel descended and Sterett turned his client over to the waiting district attorney.

For more than an hour the latter subjected Henry to a grilling cross-examination, but with a strength and self-control of which even those among the listeners who knew him best would not have dreamed him to be possessed, he replied simply, clearly, and without evasion. There wasn't any other woman in question, he had never cared for any one but the girl who was dead. He admitted that to his knowledge she had not the slightest cause for suicide, and such a step seemed irreconcilable

with her character as he had conceived it. He had been furious, desperate, when she cast him aside, he had written those letters, every word, and fully meant them at the time. If they constituted a threat, he had threatened her, but without definite intention. He had met no one he knew on the night of the nineteenth during his walk, nor seen any member of the household on returning.

Yes, he knew there were clothes-lines on the roof, he had often met Caroline, the cook, on the stairs, with a basket of laundry. He knew also about the hall closet on the top floor with the ladder which led to the roof, but he didn't remember whether the closet door fastened with a bolt or key; he hadn't been up there since the previous summer when the whole household ascended to watch a neighboring fire. Yes, he had possessed a jack-knife with sharp blades and his initials cut in the bone handle. He recalled using it some time during the spring, to whittle a wedge for his window which wouldn't stay up, but he hadn't seen it since.

The district attorney introduced a knife of the sort Henry had described in evidence and he identified it readily as his. With a smile Harker laid it aside and announced himself as satisfied.

Scarcely realizing that his ordeal was over Henry left the stand at a sign from his attorney and returned to his seat. Had the members of the grand jury recognized the truth? He glanced toward them and saw that they were all gazing at the prosecutor and at the same instant he became aware that another name had been

called, but not by Sterett. This must be in rebuttal, of course; his counsel had warned him to expect that, but who . . . ?

Then he saw the detective Stevenson making his way once more to the witness' stand and understood.

"Lieutenant Stevenson, do you recognize this knife?" The district attorney held it up and Stevenson nodded.

"Yes. It was found on the afternoon of the twentieth of last May, in the back yard of Number Three-twenty-four A. West Forty-eighth Street, next door to Mrs. Horton's. This yard had a square grass plot with shrubbery and the knife was lying deep in the soft loam under a rose-bush, almost imbedded there."

"Could some one walking there have dropped it?"

"No, they couldn't even have flung it down with force enough to make it sink in like that unless they were at some height from the ground."

"Could it have fallen from a window at the rear of Mrs. Horton's house?" the district attorney asked.

Stevenson shook his head and replied slowly.

"No. It would have dropped straight down into the yard there, instead of curving out over the fence into the next yard."

"Did you question the defendant about this knife?" Sterett demanded, when the witness was relinquished to him.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it was only brought to me at headquarters after court had opened this morning," Stevenson ex-

plained. "I didn't reach the district attorney with it until the noon recess."

"Who brought it to you?"

"The person who found it, Johnny Fay. He's a thirteen-year-old boy who lives with his mother in that house. He wanted the knife for himself and hid it, but last night his mother found it, saw the initials, and made him bring it to me to-day."

The detective was excused and the case was in the hands of the grand jury at last!

"My God, what'll they decide!" Mrs. Horton gripped her companion's arm in a convulsive, vise-like grasp. Beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead beneath the top-heavy bonnet and she breathed in deep gasps. "It ain't possible they can be such numbskulls as to think he did it! Oh, did you see poor Henry's face as they led him away? If—if things should go wrong——!"

"They won't," Mrs. Moffat replied firmly with a calmness which she was far from feeling. "Henry Jordan knows it too, don't you worry! It's just the strain that made him look like that. He knows he'll be set free—you wait and see!"

In the small room set apart for them, Henry sat with his clasped hands hanging between his knees, staring at the floor, and deaf to the encouraging words of Lockwood Sterett, who paced restlessly before him. The struggle was over, the final moment was at hand upon which his fate depended, and the sense of unreality returned, the strange lethargy encompassed him once more.

The minutes dragged into ten, twenty, half an hour.

He had heard somewhere that it was a disastrous sign when the decision was not rendered promptly, and that juries who were out for hours, all night perhaps, rarely discharged a prisoner!

An hour! He wished that Sterett would stop saying those meaningless things to him, would stop walking up and down like that! Perhaps they were going to hold him, perhaps only one or two believed in him and they would be beaten down by the others, they might be weakening now!

Anything, anything, would be better than this! To have the final moment over, to know the worst! Men had gone mad under less strain than his! Why didn't they hold him for trial and end this agony?

And then all at once the moment came! Brisk but measured steps along the corridor, the opened door, the nodded command and then the courtroom again, the sea of faces, the murmur and rustle and stifled exclamations that beat like smothering wings upon his consciousness!

As in a dream he watched the jury file in, and like an automaton he obeyed the command to turn and face them. From far away he heard the presiding judge voice the pregnant query, and then suddenly loud and clear in his ears there came the reply:

"Discharged for lack of evidence!"

CHAPTER XII

THE VOW

DISCHARGED? Could he have heard aright? The vast courtroom whirled around Henry Jordan and grew dark, but as he swayed he felt a hearty clap on the shoulder and a hand grasped his and wrung it vigorously.

“Good boy! It’s all right!” The voice of his attorney rang in his ears above the congratulatory pandemonium that reigned about him. “I told you they couldn’t help but set you free!—Brace up, Jordan, and thank them.”

The last was added in a low, compelling tone, and somehow Henry turned and murmured the words expected of him in an odd, choking voice that sounded foreign to his own ears. Then others crowded around him, faces familiar and yet strange as though half-forgotten—Mr. Pitt Marlow, Mrs. Horton, Darley, some fellow salesmen . . .

“Get me away!” he murmured hoarsely at last to Sterett. “You—you are the one to be thanked, sir, but I can’t find words! You’ve given me back my life and as long as it is mine I shall be grateful, but I can’t—I’m at the end of my rope! Help me to get away!”

Court was dismissed and somehow Henry found him-

self outside, free! Sterett was at his side, shielding him, elbowing a way for them both through the massed throng in the corridor and the phalanx of reporters, down the steps with the fresh, clean summer wind blowing refreshingly over them, to the limousine awaiting their coming.

As Henry dropped limply on the softly upholstered seat, and they rolled swiftly away, the attorney laid a hand upon his knee.

"You heard what Marlow said, my boy? Your job's waiting for you with a substantial raise, but you're to take a three-weeks' vacation and run away somewhere to forget this whole wretched affair. I have a lodge in Maine, where you'll find good fishing, the game laws aren't too rigidly enforced, and you'll run into a fine lot of sturdy backwoodsmen at a logging camp nearby. I'll be glad to start you up there to-morrow and in the meantime you're coming home with me for the night."

Henry shook his head.

"You're mighty kind." He choked and after a moment went on: "I can't tell you how grateful I am, Mr. Sterett; I hope you won't think I'm not, but right now I feel I—I've just got to get off by myself somewhere in the open, and hike and think things out. About the camp, it's more than good of you, too, but I can't decide; I can't plan yet."

"Of course; perfectly natural," Sterett remarked reassuringly. "Let me know to-morrow about that. If you'd like to take the car now, Gilbert will drive you anywhere you want to go after he drops me off."

"Thanks. I think I'll take the ferry and get over to

the palisades ; the park isn't big enough ! I don't suppose you can understand how I feel, sir, but it seems to me that it isn't over, it's only just begun ! The grand jury didn't indict me, because you made them believe that the evidence against me wasn't strong enough, but the whole world isn't going to look at it that way. They may not be actually sure I—I'm guilty, but there'll always be a doubt unless—until the whole truth is known ! There'll always be whispers, looks, faces turned away, and I'll walk alone, under a shadow !”

“Oh, come, Jordan, that's morbid !” the attorney remonstrated. “It's the reaction, that's all ! You've been proven innocent, vindicated before the world, and when the next big case comes along they'll forget all about you. Nothing is more mercifully short than the public's memory.”

“It isn't enough.” Henry shook his head once more. “When I heard the evidence, particularly of Mrs. Moffat and that nurse, it finally convinced me that Fannie didn't kill herself, she couldn't ! I supposed, of course, that she must have, and yet all the time my knowledge of her was fighting against it. Folks call suicides cowards, but I think it takes bravery of a sort—the sort that wasn't in her ! And—and hanging isn't the kind of death a woman would take as a way out, do you think so ?”

“Not ordinarily,” Sterett conceded. “In my experiences with such cases, in the experience of every one who reads the papers, a woman turns to the least violent means—poison, for the most part. But we, as well as the prosecution, combed the girl's past and between us

we unearthed every one of her associates, during the last year or two at any rate, and there seems to have been no more motive for her murder than for suicide. You can depend upon it, Jordan, whatever mystery there is about her death will remain a mystery now. That book is closed, and the sooner you follow the example of the general public and put it out of your mind, the better for you."

Henry did not reply, but sat lost in his own thoughts until they reached the attorney's house, where he took leave of him and yielded to persuasion to have the chauffeur take him at least to the ferry. He dreaded the press of humanity about him which a crowded street car would have meant, morbidly sensitive lest all the world would recognize him from the sketches which had been blazoned in the newspapers and cry out his name, denounce him. He longed to get away in the fast-falling twilight, out under the stars, with only the trees rustling about him and the river far below. There he could think, or rather, let his crowding thoughts take shape and coherency in his mind.

A ferry-boat was just ready to cast off as he reached the slip, and he made his way well forward, leaning over the rail just within the gate and turning his shoulder to the crowd about him, laborers mostly, for it was still a little early for the office workers. No one paid the slightest attention to him, and after a few deep breaths of the pungent river air he lifted his head and felt the blood racing more freely through his veins.

He was free, and although the thought brought with

it a surging wave of devout thankfulness, it was without exultation, for he was still bound irrevocably to the past. He was master once more of his own actions, but the future did not lay clear before him and would not until the looming shadows had been finally dispersed. The guttural-voiced, roughly-clothed men about him were separated from him as by a wall, invisible but impassable, and so would all his fellows be while Fannie Gillespie's death remained unsolved.

When the craft was warped into its slip on the farther side he held back until the bulk of the passengers had disembarked and then followed, unconsciously imitating their purposeful, hurried gait until he was clear of the ferry house, and started on foot along the winding road ascending the overhanging cliff. It was quite dark now and the first stars were glimmering faintly while the wind had freshened to a stiff, steady blow.

He lifted his face gratefully to meet it and trudged on, his limbs aching from the unaccustomed effort after his confinement, but his brain clearing and tortured nerves at rest.

Fannie Gillespie had not taken her own life! He was convinced of this at last, not because of the mere suggestion that some one had been watching the house, that the gas had so suddenly been extinguished in her room, but from a deeper, intuitive sense that seemed stronger than knowledge. Suicide was beyond the possibilities of her nature, even had she cause to wish herself out of the world, and nothing could have happened, however tragic, which would drive her to such an alternative.

Some one, from some motive as yet undreamed of, had forced an entrance to her room and drawn that rope about her neck before she could make an outcry, perhaps before she even awoke! Who it was, what the motive, and how it had been accomplished remained for Henry himself to discover, not alone to clear his own name but for the sake of her memory. He had once loved her, he had offered her his own life, and although she had refused that offer it was still hers, at her service while a duty toward her remained unperformed.

He left the road and turned down a wooded path that ran along the edge of the cliff. Everything was very still, as he had hoped, with only the wind sweeping through the trees and the pebbles crunching underfoot. A solitary policeman glanced at him perfunctorily as he passed, but he walked with such a free, swinging stride, erect and almost buoyant, that no second thought was vouchsafed him. Straight down, over the swaying tops of tier after tier of trees, the river lay shining mistily where the tiny moving pinpoints of light denoted the craft upon its bosom; busy little tugs, clumsy ferries, and statelier river steamers, with here and there a long line of scows like some sluggish, uncoiled serpent. Muffled puffing and snorts, the faint, shrill rebuke or warning of a whistle, the deeper, long-drawn-out remonstrance of horns and blast of sirens, these came vaguely to his ears as from another world.

A tall tree hung precariously over an outjutting rock, its roots clawing beneath it into the empty air above a sheer descent of many feet to the next level of swaying

tree-tops, and here Henry seated himself, his hat on the stone beside him and hands clasped about his knee.

He found his thoughts going over once more as automatically as a machine, the evidence in the case as it had been unfolded at the hearing, and the scene itself rose again before him, shutting out the rustling night and the quiet stars overhead. He was back in the courtroom, facing the judge's bench and the witness stand, feeling the eyes of the jury upon him from one side and the battery of countless ones from the close-packed spectators, whenever he turned his head.

All at once a face appeared from among them, seeming to stand out apart and alone; a face which, strangely enough, he could not actually be sure he had seen. It was that of a girl, serious, intent, with smooth, shining brown hair, a firm, sweet mouth and deep violet eyes which regarded him without question or criticism, in perfect understanding and sympathy. (It was just a vision, of course, a trick of his overwrought nerves; he'd never seen any such girl, certainly not there in the courtroom, but it was odd how clearly the face arose before him.

He frowned in puzzled thought and gradually it blurred and faded, and Fannie Gillespie appeared in its place as he had last seen her, pretty and pert, her round blue eyes sparkling and the swift color coming and going in her smooth cheeks, paste jewels glittering at her ears and throat. How bright and almost startlingly vivid her personality had been, how sentient with glowing youth and life! It was not the Fannie who had cud-

dled against him in rare moments of tenderness, naïvely eager for petting and admiration, but the pouting, flouting girl who in her disdain had lost all allure, yet to whom now more than ever he owed a solemn duty.

He had not missed the point of Sterett's remark in the limousine; the mystery would remain a mystery as far as any further effort on the part of the authorities might be considered. The book was closed with his dismissal, the case would be shelved and interest in it die through sheer inanition, while the stigma of suicide or more grim suggestion of murder would cling to her name as long as it was remembered.

This would not be of lengthy duration, for she had been merely one of the army of young working women of no social position or importance, one whose only claim upon public interest had been the manner of her taking off. There was all the more need for him to work quickly if her name were to be cleared and he vowed that it should be. Alone on the heights, between the mighty river and the stars which seemed so near, Henry took a solemn oath that he would find the man whose hands had tightened that rope about her throat. No scandal, sordid or opprobrious, could be connected with her memory; no fear of that entered his thoughts, but he knew the suggestion of its possibility would linger in the minds of the vast horde of outsiders until the truth were revealed.

He had three weeks of leisure before the treadmill should claim him again; three weeks in which to find this unknown man! There could be no long, somnolent days

in the Maine woods to heal his harassed spirit, no solitude in which to hide his sensitive wounds; he must plunge straight into the thick of things, back into the old existence where every turn would be a reminder to others as well as himself. He must run the daily, hourly gauntlet of eyes and thoughts and tongues, but though he shrank indescribably from it, no thought of shirking came to him. He had pledged himself to the cause of this girl who would have none of him in life, and at all costs he meant to carry on.

Curiously enough, no apprehension of failure assailed him. With no slightest idea of how he was to set about his self-imposed task, no clue to guide him but a lurking shadow among deeper shadows, Henry meant to start upon his search there where the crime had actually been consummated. There must be some indication, even after all these weeks, which the police, in their zeal to convict him, had overlooked; some incident, trifling in all but its significance, of her last days that would point perhaps to a motive never considered, a murderer who must believe himself secure from suspicion now and forever.

Henry had had no experience, no knowledge of personal investigation save that which had been directed against himself, and criminal cases as recorded in the newspapers had held no interest for him heretofore. He could plan no mode of procedure, lay down no rules, decide upon no definite course. Luck, chance, fate—upon these alone he must rely, but the unbending will to succeed brought with it a sense of strength and power, and faith, sure and confident, upheld him as he rose at

last. He would find the murderer of Fannie Gillespie and hand him over to the justice which nodded now!

In the spacious library of his home, Judge Carberry smoked reflectively before the empty hearth. It was late and the rest of the household had long since retired, but he could not compose himself to sleep. Long years on the bench had not inured him to the strain of indictments for murder in the first degree, and whenever youth appeared before him, however hotheaded and misguided, and the possibility that he would be called upon to pronounce the words which would ultimately cut it down, blot it from existence, hung over him, it weighed upon his spirit with a dread which would never have been guessed from his sternly implacable expression.

He thanked whatever gods were his that he had not been compelled to hold the prisoner for trial to-day. The young man with boyishly curling hair and earnest, candid eyes who had told his story with such straightforward conscientiousness was innocent, if ever he had beheld innocence, and the relief with which he had set him free brought the reaction of nervous exhaustion now that banished sleep even as it cloaked him with peace.

His musing was interrupted by the whirring summons of the doorbell and he rose with a questioning glance at the clock. Who could the visitor be at such an hour? Some one must have an urgent message to deliver and the old butler was asleep far at the top of the house. Gathering his dressing-gown about his long frame, Judge Carberry shuffled out into the hall and opened the door.

A young man stood there, hat in hand, and as the light

from the lamp on the newel post of the staircase shone upon his face the judge recognized Henry Jordan.

"Come in," he invited quietly as he held the door wide. "You wished to see me?"

"Yes, sir." Henry advanced, but not beyond the glow of the lamp, and his host saw that already the strained, hunted look had left his eyes but his expression was resolute and grim. "I must ask you to forgive my coming here, and so late, but I wanted to make sure that you would not forget me. Judge Carberry, please look at me well and remember me, for some day I shall appear before you again!"

"You?" The judge gazed at him in utter amazement. Surely the lad must be distraught, his mind temporarily unhinged by the ordeal through which he had passed! "You were discharged to-day. You are free, young man!"

"I do not mean that I shall be arraigned." A slight smile twisted his set lips and then they straightened once more in a line of rigorous determination. "When next I appear before you, Judge Carberry, it will not be as a prisoner, an accused man! That is why I ask you to look at me and remember me well, for I shall come as a witness; a witness against the real murderer of Fannie Gillespie!"

CHAPTER XIII

HOMECOMING

“**I** DON’T know if he understood!” Mrs. Horton exclaimed for the hundredth time as she aimlessly rearranged the bisque atrocities on her parlor mantel. “I told him plain enough, the Lord knows, when I went up and shook his hand, but he didn’t seem to even hear! It’s real good of you to sit up and keep me company, Marian, but like as not I’ll be up till morning!”

Miss Gray, who had become just “Marian” now, smiled tranquilly as she raised her eyes to the anxious landlady.

“I don’t mind,” she responded. “I’ll run away, of course, as soon as Mr. Jordan rings. Perhaps he didn’t understand you, but he will surely come!”

“I’m not so sure,” Mrs. Horton shook her head dolefully. “I ought to have taken hold of him right there in the courtroom, but that lawyer whisked him away before I could ca’m down enough to think! I telephoned him and he said Henry wasn’t there, he’d left him to go and take a long walk by himself. Piece of foolishness, I call it! That boy oughtn’t to be alone right now, thinking over his troubles that are past and gone; home’s the place for him and this is the only one he’s got. If you could have seen him—?”

She paused expressively and after a moment Marian said:

"I did. I was there to-day, in the back of the courtroom."

"You?" Mrs. Horton stared. "Why didn't you come with Mis' Moffat and me? I'd have asked you if I thought you were interested."

"I was, but I hadn't any real intention of going until the last minute. Something drew me, I don't know what it was; I couldn't seem to think of anything else." The girl flushed slightly. "It wasn't just idle curiosity, Mrs. Horton, but I don't feel exactly like an outsider; living here with you where it all happened made it seem close to me and I have been interested in the case from the start, but I was afraid you would think it an intrusion. I—I wanted to see what Mr. Jordan was like, and how the hearing would turn out."

"It turned out the only way it could have, thank heavens, but I did have some mighty scary times, especially yesterday. Now you've seen Henry, what do you think of him? You're a stranger to him yet, Marian, and you ain't prejudiced one way or the other. Looking at him as he stood there to-day facing the grand jury, and hearing and reading what you have about the whole thing, no matter what the finding was, would you think he was guilty? Do you think he could ever in this world commit murder?"

"No." Marion spoke with quiet, sure conviction. "One glimpse of his face would have told me that, I think, whatever the evidence might have been, or even the

grand jury's finding. No one could doubt his innocence!"

"You dear child!" Mrs. Horton took both her hands and beamed upon her. "You and him are going to be friends, I can see that, and he'll need friends now, new ones that'll kind of take him away from the past. That's what worries me to-night, for under all that quietness of his he's terrible proud and sensitive, and maybe he feels that he just can't bring himself to come back here, with all of us knowing how much he used to think of her and seeing him go through all he told about on the stand this afternoon. He may imagine that some of us doubt him, even now, but we never did! I've been saying just what you do from the time that bull-headed detective took him away, but nobody can depend on juries. It's a comfort that you, who don't even know him, couldn't help but see the truth!"

Marian turned suddenly.

"Somebody is coming up the steps!" she declared under her breath. "Can't you hear them? Whoever it is, they are coming very slowly as though they were tired out. Is everybody——?"

"Everybody else is in, long ago!" exclaimed Mrs. Horton excitedly. "It's him, at last.—Don't you go, Marian; I want you to meet him right away! It'll make it lots easier for him and he'll be heartened up to know how you felt, soon as you looked at him!"

"Oh, no!" the girl protested, warm color flooding her cheeks again. "I couldn't—he mustn't know, and besides he will want to be alone! Good-night!"

She was at the foot of the stairs, but the landlady had waddled hurriedly after her and laid a hand upon her arm.

"I'll take it as a favor if you'll wait, Marian! You'll know how to talk to him and make him feel at home again while I'm fixing up a little bite of supper just for the three of us—There!"

The bell had rung, a mere tentative touch as though the newcomer were not sure of his welcome, and Marian paused irresolute as Mrs. Horton hastened to the door and flung it wide.

"I declare, Henry, this is the latest you've ever come home, and I—I've been waiting for you a good while!" The motherly voice with its brave assumption of cheer trembled suspiciously. "Your room's ready, I've kept it so right along!"

"Dear Mrs. Horton!" He wrung both her hands, and the listening girl could hear an answering tremor in his quiet, low tones. "I might have known and yet——!"

Words failed him and the landlady drew him in and shut the door.

"Where've you been?" she demanded. "When did you eat last?"

"I—I don't know. It doesn't matter!" He drew his hand across his eyes and then caught sight of the girl on the stairs. For a moment he stared at her unbelievably and she regarded him in return with a steady, friendly gaze, unconscious of any embarrassment.

"Henry, I want to make you acquainted with Miss Marian Gray." Mrs. Horton had followed the direc-

tion of his glance and proceeded to do the honors with alacrity. "Marian, this is Mr. Jordan that we've been talking about. She was there in court to-day, Henry, and she says that one look at your face would have told anybody you couldn't have done it, no matter what the evidence was, or whether you were held or not! There couldn't anybody have doubted you!"

"You said that?" Henry advanced and held out his hand. "I hope some time you will let me thank you; I can't seem to find words to-night. I knew you were there, I saw you, and I guess I knew, too, that you sort of believed in me."

"I did," she murmured as she withdrew her hand from his. "You've nothing to thank me for, Mr. Jordan; nobody could think anything else, and we don't need to talk about it."

"You two go and set in the parlor for a minute while I fix us a bite," Mrs. Horton directed. "I'll bet you didn't have any dinner or lunch either, Henry, and a hot cup of coffee'll do you good. It'll perk in two shakes!"

Cutting short his protestations she turned to the back stairs and Marian led the way to the parlor, seized by a panicky embarrassment at the room's determined formality.

"I came two weeks ago." Without thought she stammered out the first words which entered her mind, anything to break the silence which had fallen between them with the landlady's departure. "I'm from up in New England, you know, and this is my first summer in the

city. I suppose you—you've been here a long time, Mr. Jordan?"

"Since I was just a little fellow. My folks died and my aunt came up back in Pennsylvania and got me, but then she died, too, and I scratched along alone." He was scarcely conscious of what he said. The girl with the firm, sweet mouth and eyes like April violets! The girl whose face he had seen and remembered even when he was sure it was only a trick of his overwrought mind! There was such a girl, after all, she was here! Abruptly he added: "It's funny, my seeing you to-day in all that crowd! I thought of you again after it was all over, the way you had looked at me, but I wasn't sure you'd actually been there! I thought perhaps I had imagined it!"

There was no mistaking his naïve honesty and Marian laughed softly, a rippling little laugh which held no note of self-consciousness. Then her face grew serious.

"How did you think I looked at you?" she asked.

"Just sort of friendly and understanding." Henry seemed to grope for a means of expressing his thought. "It was almost as if you spoke to me and gave me your hand, and it lent me confidence, somehow, when I'd about done thinking or caring. I can't tell you how much it meant to me!"

"I'm glad," Marian observed simply. "I remember I was thinking I would like to do just that; give you my hand and tell you how certain I was that everything would come out all right. It's nice to know you felt that, even if you didn't believe I was real!"

"I guess I did," he said slowly and thoughtfully. "I couldn't be certain because my mind was sort of hazy and dull, and I didn't altogether trust it, but I guess I knew all the time that you were really there and sometime I'd see you again. I didn't know it was to be so soon, though; I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you standing on the stairs out there just now!"

"I—I was going up to my room." Marian's glance fell and a wave of shyness swept over her. "I had stopped to talk to Mrs. Horton and it was later than I thought. She said she was going to wait up for you till morning and I think if you hadn't come by then she would have gone out to look for you!"

Why should she feel so silly and conscious because this young man who had suffered so much and so terribly spoke right straight out from his thoughts without trying to hide them or realizing how personal they sounded? She was provoked and ashamed. He would be the last to say pretty, insincere things, Marian knew, even if he were not utterly weary and disillusioned, broken with the torture through which he had passed, and grateful for a stranger's friendliness.

"Mrs. Horton's a wonder!" he said warmly. "She mothers all of us and I don't believe we half appreciate it till we—we're away for a while. Lockwood Sterett, my attorney, asked me to stay at his house to-night, but though I couldn't do that, I didn't mean to come back here and impose on her goodness. I couldn't make up my mind to go anywhere else, somehow."

"Of course not! You would have offended her dread-

fully if you had, for she feels that this is your home." Marian paused and then ventured: "Shall you go back to business right away?"

"No. I've a few weeks' vacation and Sterett offered me his fishing camp up in Maine, but I think I'll just hang around and get used to things again, fall back into my old groove," he replied. He was not ready yet to take any one into his confidence concerning his purpose, but as he spoke it flamed again in his thoughts. He had made a vow, assumed a trust, and he would not rest until it was fulfilled. Fannie Gillespie's murderer must be found! Instinctively he turned the conversation away from himself and his own immediate future. "You've just come to New York, Miss Gray? Are you studying something here?"

"Only the disposition of my employer!" Marian smiled again and sensing the sudden reserve in his manner, she launched out into a description of her secretarial work and the people with whom she came in contact, seeking to divert his thoughts. She was rewarded by an awakened light of interest in his tired eyes, and then Mrs. Horton summoned them to the dining-room where she had laid a cozy little side-table for three.

"Fried oysters, first of the season!" she announced. "I saved 'em out when Caroline made the stew to-night and they ought to go good with some of these pickles I put up last week. I got the coffee good and strong the way you like it, Henry."

Murmuring an appreciation the young man seated

himself and glanced around the homely, familiar room in a sudden daze. There was the old-fashioned leaden castor with one leg bent, canting perilously in the center of the long table, the "still life" of defunct duck hanging a bit crookedly on the wall, the imitation filet curtain at the window, freshly laundered, but with its woven warrior capering a trifle more eccentrically from a new darn which threw him completely from his equilibrium—had only a few hours passed, or years, since he had seen them last? Henry's hand closed mechanically over the bone napkin ring with his initials scratched on it that Mrs. Horton had presented to him long ago, and he choked.

But the hospitable landlady was bustling about serving them and chattering volubly to Marian Gray, and neither appeared to notice his momentary emotion. Not until she poured his second cup of coffee did Mrs. Horton address him directly and then it was with an artfully casual request.

"Henry, soon as you can get 'round to it, I wish you'd fix a new lock on the front door for me. I had a man in from the avenue to change it Monday and he give us all bright, new keys, and now nobody can work it; Agnes' legs are run off letting 'em in."

"I'll do it first thing in the morning," he promised. Then a quick flash of memory came to him, and he asked: "Have any other locks in the house been changed or repaired?"

"Not a one, except—except on the top floor," Mrs. Horton confessed. "I put it off till fall cleaning."

"Then I'll go all over them to-morrow," Henry sighed with relief. "It will sort of get my hand in again. I was telling Miss Gray that I have quite a vacation, but I'd rather putter around the house than go away, except perhaps for a short trip."

"That's fine!" Mrs. Horton beamed. "Mr. Darley's kind of lost ambition since he fell on the flat of his back at his gymnasium trying to chin himself, and it'll be real handy to have you 'round. Where was you thinking of going on a short trip?"

"I hadn't decided," Henry temporized. In truth, the idea was born of that moment and still vague in his mind, but perhaps it would be a starting point. . . . "Have you been away at all this summer?"

"Marian and me went down to one of the beaches on Sunday, but she didn't like the crowds, and noise, and dirt, and neither did I! I told her we'd take our lunch some day and go out in the real country where it's pleasant and quiet, but we never did."

"Will you let me take you both?" Henry felt surprised at his own eagerness, as he glanced at the girl. "I know a splendid place with a wide, rushing brook and big trees; the average motorist seldom finds it and you wouldn't dream how near the city it is."

Marian's eyes were a bluish violet, he discovered, as she lifted them to his in thanking him; almost the blue of that patch of sky he used to watch through the bars of his cell window, and her lips weren't as firm and unyielding as he had thought. Beneath his unconsciously

fixed scrutiny she flushed all at once and he saw how young she was; somehow he'd taken it for granted that she must be older, she was so quiet and seemed to understand things, falling into a fellow's mood without trying to drag him into hers. Maybe she'd see how he felt about what he had to do if he could bring himself to tell her, sometime.

The trio cleared the table and washed dishes together in the big, roomy kitchen and afterward, when Henry found himself once more in his own old room, he turned out the light and drew the shabby Morris chair to the open window for a final cigarette.

To-morrow he would examine all the locks; to-morrow he would start the task he had set for himself. It mightn't be a bad plan to take that trip, after all, if he couldn't get a line on anything here; Fannie hadn't been in the city so very long.—It was strange that they both had brown hair and blue eyes, but Fannie's hair had been frizzed and this other girl's was as smooth and glossy as a bird's wing; Fannie's eyes had been round and china-blue, and Marian's. . . . But what was he thinking? Girls would never have any part in his life, any more. He would be a marked man even when this shadow of hideous doubt was lifted from him and the truth was known. He owed it to Fannie, and the love he had once given to the girl he thought she was, to solve the mystery of her death and after that—well, there was his work, of course.

He was pretty tired; he hadn't realized it before.

Older, too; a fellow couldn't go through what he had and ever come back. He watched the tiny spark of his cigarette as it curved outward and down into the yard, and then stumbled to his bed.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMPACT

THE mood of deep dejection had lightened with the morning and when Henry summoned his self-control and descended to the dining-room the reception he received from Simeon Darley, Myrtle Harris, and even the comparative stranger, Edgar North, was balm to his sensitive spirit and removed the last trace of his agonizing self-consciousness.

Agnes, more angular and untidy than ever, favored him with an unprecedented grin as she placed his strawberries before him, and when Mrs. Moffat appeared she dropped her hand lightly on his shoulder as he would have risen.

"This is splendid!" she said in a hearty, low tone. "There's a new picture I'm dying to see soon; will my age protect me from an imputation of brazenness if I ask you to take me?"

"Whenever you please!" he responded. "I—I can't thank you for yesterday; Mr. Sterett told me how you went to him——!"

"I had to make myself important, too!" Mrs. Moffat smiled. "Trust a woman for getting in a word somewhere!"

She moved around the table and seated herself de-

liberately in the empty chair which Fannie Gillespie had occupied, darting a swift, meaning glance at Mrs. Horton's dumbfounded face. That lady recovered herself quickly, however, and gestured vigorously beyond Henry's bent head for the gaping Agnes to change the service from Mrs. Moffat's old place.

Henry did not note the byplay; the shock of beholding the buyer from Ohio there in Fannie's chair was for a moment overwhelming and he bowed his head as he fumbled for the berries with his spoon. But no one paid any attention to him and when under cover of the prosaic, everyday chatter going on about the table, he raised his eyes again, only those of Marian Gray met them. Hers were warm with sympathy, but she smiled brightly and he found himself replying in kind.

The meal concluded, he selected some tools from the long unused box upon the shelf containing the implements for his experiments, and, first making good his promise to adjust the lock on the front door properly, he went on up through the house. When at last he reached the top floor he paused before the door of Fannie's room. The burst lock had been repaired, and the same key was again inserted in it.

He took it out and examined it again beneath the skylight, as he had on the day the murder was discovered. Then replacing it in the lock he essayed several experiments with one and another of the small tools he carried. Satisfied, he glanced down cautiously over the stair-rail into the empty hall below, turned back to the door, and thrusting it determinedly open, he entered.

It was evident that Mrs. Horton had neglected here to follow her usual custom of trailing along in Agnes' wake to be assured that her work was done thoroughly, for a thick coating of dust lay over everything. Henry had never been in the little room before except once, when he followed Officer Burke to find the slender body swinging from the towering bedpost, and now the thought turned him sick and faint, but he forced it resolutely from him and holding his breath in the stifling, musty air he strode to the window and flung it wide, the dust rising in little clouds at every step.

The high, narrow bed, stripped bare, had been covered with a muslin casing, but only a gray, powdery film lay over the dresser and wash-stand, and the two chairs were set stiffly back against the wall. The drawers and closet contained not so much as the merest scrap of dress fabric or paper, and even the carpet had been taken up and rolled in a corner, while any marks which must have been discernible on the windowsill, if the detective Stevenson had spoken truly during that momentous interview, had vanished now.

Henry glanced out at the house directly in the rear. It was from that window just below the level on which he stood that the nurse Evelyn Trimble had seen the light go out so suddenly. What could it mean?

No wiser than when he had entered, he left the room at last, closing the door behind him, and descended to the next floor, to find North standing in the doorway of his own front hallroom.

"I didn't want to speak before your old friends, Mr.

Jordan, but I want you-all to know how mighty glad I am!" he said earnestly as he extended his hand. "I told Mrs. Horton all the time that though I didn't know ve'y much about no'thern co'ts I was right certain a grave mistake had been made."

"Thanks." Henry shook hands heartily. He had liked the newcomer from their first meeting and his cordial goodfellowship met with a ready response. "I'm fortunate in my friends! Every one's been just bully all the way through!"

"Why wouldn't they?" North smiled, and then his face grew grave. "I've got a day off from bond-selling and Mrs. Horton tells me you're on a vacation. I'd be ve'y happy to have you lunch with me at a little place I've found run by a real N'Orleans cook. It's just a wooden shack away up on the river-front near some boathouses, but he sure does fix crabs like our crawfish down home. There's something I'd like to talk over with you, if you will permit me."

"Why, thanks!" Henry repeated. "I'll be glad to! I'm doing a bit of tinkering 'round the house now for Mrs. Horton, but I'll be through by noon."

"We'll say half-past twelve, then?" North nodded. "Bring a coat, for it'll be right cool up there."

As he went on downstairs, bound for the basement, Henry wondered what the other could have to talk over with him. His tone had suggested that it was a semi-confidential matter, but North hardly knew him. What could he think that they had in common?

He had no time to puzzle about it, however, for Mrs.

Moffat had paused in the main entrance hall on hearing his step and a swift impulse came to him.

"Are you in a hurry?" He saw that she was dressed for the street, but she shook her head.

"Just a little personal shopping, for once!" she replied. "Did you want to speak to me? Let's go in the parlor."

She led the way and he followed, at a loss how to begin but eager to learn what he might.

Mrs. Moffat, however, paved the way for him.

"Was it about my testimony yesterday?" she asked.

"Yes," Henry hesitated. "I know it's all over and done with and I don't want to go around boring people, but naturally I can't put it out of my mind just yet and I'm curious to know more about that man you saw over in the areaway that night."

She shook her head.

"I'm dreadfully sorry, but I don't know any more than I told." Her tone was frankly regretful. "I wish I'd looked out earlier, then we'd have known whether he was there before Fannie got back from that dance or not. When I talked with her after her quarrel with that fellow Ward and saw that she was afraid of him, I thought it might have been he that first night; that he'd followed her home from the dance. But unless he was waiting his chance to break into the house and do her harm——?"

"I don't think so," Henry said slowly. "I believed what he said yesterday; you heard him, Mrs. Moffat. He was hard hit and he's got a pretty fierce temper, I

guess, but I don't think he'd take it out on a girl. It must have been somebody else you saw."

"I've come to that conclusion, too," Mrs. Moffat remarked. "It couldn't have been the actor who was with her—at least he hadn't anything to do with what happened afterward, for then he was half unconscious, by all accounts, from Ward's attack on him. There's the other one, of course, the man from the amusement park."

"Newell? He seemed to be just a friend. Did—did Fannie speak of him to you?" asked Henry quickly.

"She just said that a friend of hers had a concession at Knickerbocker Beach." Mrs. Moffat dismissed him with a shrug and added: "Mr. Jordan, if it wasn't this Frank Ward of whom Fannie was afraid, who was it? There must have been some one we don't know about. Perhaps you didn't notice how nervously she acted in the dining-room and how she kept glancing at the window as though she expected somebody to break through it, but I did, and so did Mrs. Horton."

"I know. There didn't seem to be anything different in her manner that I can remember except that she was more lively and full of spirits than before, but I—well, you know how it was with us; I didn't talk to her any more than just to be polite and she never even looked at me.—There isn't anything you can tell me, then?" Undisguised disappointment sounded in his tone. "I thought she might have said something else that would give us a clue, if you could recall it."

"Not a thing." Mrs. Moffat eyed him shrewdly. "After all, there isn't much to make any one think it

was a case of murder, Mr. Jordan. 'As for the man I saw across the street, he could have been on quite innocent business, or watching for some one from another house. We've really as much reason to believe she killed herself, for we don't know the motive in either case, and I think we'll find that is what the police will decide. Of course, you can't put it out of your thoughts, but it won't do any good to brood over it, and you've got the future to think of."

That was practically what Sterett had said, Henry reflected as he went with her to the door and then proceeded to the basement. The authorities had shot their bolt and the motive for either murder or suicide was buried in a maddening oblivion.

If only Fannie could speak! She, who had chattered so freely of everything that came into her head, who never appeared to have a secret she wouldn't willingly have shared with any one who cared to listen, whose life was made up of little, inconsequent things, as superficial and ephemerally bright as the paste jewelry she had loved—the thought of mystery in connection with her seemed incredible!

Yet it was there! If, after all, his instinct was at fault and she had somehow found courage to take that mad, desperate step of her own volition, there must have been some cause, and that cause remained to be discovered.

At half-past twelve North knocked on his door to find him lost in a moody abstraction, his room filled with the smoke of innumerable cigarettes. He seemed glad

of the interruption, however, and the young Southerner exerted himself, while tactfully ignoring his guest's depression, to exorcise it by an account of his activities in the bond market. He talked wittily and well, in his soft, liquid drawl, with a quiet humor which Henry found irresistible in spite of himself, and by the time they emerged from the subway far uptown the blue devils were temporarily banished.

The little shack beyond the railroad tracks at the foot of a steep hill glistened whitely in a new coat of paint, with an awninged platform built out over the water and the rollers from a passing steamer lapping pleasantly underneath. Launches were moored here and there, and canoes tied to small docks on either hand, while joyous shouts came from behind a beached scow where a crowd of urchins were bathing.

Well as he knew the out-of-the-way spots of the city, it was a novel environment for Henry and he relaxed under its influence. The crabs were incomparably good, the smiling negro host a quaintly amusing character, and North an entertaining companion.

The latter had said there was something he would like to discuss, but not until the meal was concluded and cigarettes curled fragrant smoke into the air did he broach the subject. Then, gazing thoughtfully out over the broad, dancing river, he observed:

"I've heard No'therners say we hold life cheap down where I come from because an insult that only brings hot words up here means a hurry call for the undertaker there, but I reckon we've got a different code, that's all.

I wanted to ask you-all something, Mr. Jordan, and then I won't refer to a painful subject again."

"Ask away, North, but don't 'Mr.' me!" Henry smiled. "You've proved a good pal, and if you want to know anything about the trial, it's all right; I've gotten over being sensitive."

"It goes back further than that." North's dark eyes fell to the glowing tip of his cigarette for a moment and then he lifted them frankly to his guest. "Do you-all remember a little talk we had together in your room the mo'ning Miss Gillespie was found dead? Mr. Darley was there, too, and you said you meant to find out who it was brought on her whatever trouble she was in and make them pay. Of co'se there wasn't any suspicion then but that it was suicide. Mr. Darley announced he was with you-all in anything you were going to do, and though I was a stranger to you I offered to help. Then the police made that miserable blunder and ev'ything was changed. When her brother appeared I figured there'd be some action, but I reckon he's mighty close to being what we call white trash down home! Now that it's been proved you-all have got clean hands, I wanted to ask if your intentions are still what they were that day, or if you've concluded to let the past just bury itself."

"Not by a long shot!" He drew a deep breath. "I didn't mean to speak of it to any one, but that's why I'm sticking around instead of taking a real vacation. I can't believe Fannie killed herself, now that I've had time to think about it, but if she did I'm more determined

than ever to find out why, and what sudden trouble drove her to her death! I won't rest till I've discovered the truth!"

"That's what I had hoped!" North nodded and a slight flush mounted in the clear olive of his cheeks. "It's the way I have felt about it from the beginning, for as I told you-all I was raised to look on ev'y good woman as one whom it was a duty and a privilege to protect. I wanted to help you-all, too, but I couldn't figure out a way, for I was unacquainted with Miss Gillespie's affairs. However, I stand where I did that mo'ning and I'll be mighty happy if you-all will count me in with you! You called me a pal, Henry; will you 'low me to be one now?"

He extended his hand once more and Henry grasped it impulsively.

"You bet I will! I thought I'd go at this thing alone, but it'll be a lot better to have some one to talk it over with, and I shouldn't wonder if you helped tremendously, more than we dream of now! A stranger's point of view is a good thing sometimes, and you've proved yourself! We'll work together; it's a compact!"

North's white teeth flashed in an appreciative smile and then he flushed.

"Henry, I don't want you to take this amiss, but it's a partnership now and I feel I must do my share in eve'y way. Mighty few real So'therners have had any money for two or three generations and I never can seem to keep what I do make, but there's always a way of doing things in a good cause." He hesitated and pulled a small

leather wallet from his pocket, opening the thin bill-fold compartment. "Don't object to my saying so, but I must be a mite better fixed right now than you, though it isn't talking big, by any means, and I want to help defray the expenses of our search—Good Lord!"

He uttered the sharp exclamation in an almost horrified tone and reached convulsively for the small oblong of paper which had slipped from the wallet and fluttered to the floor.

Henry could see only that there was heavy printing upon it with some handwriting below and figures added, and he shrugged and smiled as it was shamefacedly retrieved. A pawnticket! Who of his associates hadn't been reduced to such an expediency at some time or another? Realizing the almost fierce pride of his companion, however, he ignored the incident and exclaimed hastily:

"Couldn't think of it, North, but thanks just the same! I'm prepared to meet any expenses that may crop up, and I don't think they'll be heavy. Don't insist, old man; I appreciate it, but it's impossible."

North eyed him sharply as though in dread lest the other had noted the slip of paper and recognized it for what it was, but Henry returned his gaze steadily, and his agitation diminished. He returned the wallet to his pocket with a nod, and after a little pause asked: "Where do we start? I didn't 'tend the co't case because it would have looked like plain curiosity, but I read ev'y word of the evidence in the papers and I reckon I know just how matters stood with you-all, so I won't

ask anything you don't want to tell me, but what do we do first?"

"I don't know!" Henry responded ruefully. "I went over every inch of that room this morning, though I suppose it was foolish to hope for a clue there after all this time, and I tried to sound Mrs. Moffat, to find out if she had seen or learned anything more definite than she told on the stand yesterday. She hadn't, though, and the best she could do was to advise me not to brood over it. That was what Sterett said, too, only in different words; he predicted that the police would shelve it and the truth never come out. I haven't a ghost of an idea, except one; it's only a forlorn hope, I'm afraid, but if I can't dig up anything here I've about made up my mind to have a shot at it. There's just one person who might know or suspect something, but be keeping quiet about it because of small-town dread of gossip, and that is that brother of hers; I thought of beating it to Bison and having it out with him."

"My Lord! That's a splendid notion!" North's eyes sparkled. "I suspected that he might have told something and that was why he kept away from the co't! It stands to reason we're mo' likely to find the cause for whatever did happen right there where she was raised. Do you want me to come along?"

"No." Henry shook his head. "It's just a chance, but I think I'll run up alone to-night and not waste any more time here. You keep your eyes open, though, and when I get back we'll take a fresh start. You know how I feel about Fannie, I guess; it was all over long

before she died, but I owe it to her memory to clear up this mystery and I'll do it if hell freezes! I can't tell you how glad I am to have you in on this with me!"

They talked until the sun was low and a light summer breeze again heralded the coming night and, although the conference brought no further light to bear on their task, it strengthened the mutual liking into friendship. They were allies, partners in a solemn compact to solve the mystery of Fannie Gillespie's death, and Henry felt more than ever confident. Somehow, the truth would be revealed!

CHAPTER XV

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

EVADING the amazed protestations of Mrs. Horton, Henry telephoned to Lockwood Sterett, declining the offer of his camp, and then hastily threw a change of apparel into a small bag and caught the early evening train for Bison. He did not know what manner of man this brother of Fannie's might be, but he had drawn a shrewd conclusion from her infrequent reminiscences. In the way of trade he had sold things to many a skeptical, close-fisted prospect by a psychology peculiarly his own, and now he sat late in the smoking-car, planning his campaign, as the train tore through the darkness.

Not by admitting his intention of keeping the mystery alive could he hope to gain his point, for the mere suggestion of reawakened notoriety would arouse all the stubborn antagonism of the man, since he had been so ready to hurry his sister into a suicide's grave. There would be his possible suspicion of Henry's guilt to take into consideration, but that must be risked and overcome. If a spark of sentiment remained in that desiccated nature he meant to take advantage of it in a manner that would be wholly unsuspected, for only inadvertently

would William Gillespie, he was convinced, contribute a clue to the truth.

Ed North had promised to look up Fannie's late admirers who had testified at the hearing and see if anything could be learned from them. He was unknown to them and the easy camaraderie, which he could assume in spite of his reserve, ought to stand him in good stead, Henry reflected. He had seldom encountered a more winning personality than that of the young Southerner, nor one so thoroughly congenial on brief acquaintance, and he suspected that more latent energy and fire existed beneath that tranquil, almost drowsy exterior, than would have been guessed.

His own life had been so dominated by his work that he had had no more time to devote to close companionship with other men of his age than he had for the society of girls, and this proffered friendship had come at a time when it was doubly grateful to his bruised spirit.

Marian Gray had stopped him in the hall to wish him a pleasant trip and now his thoughts turned back to her as he made his way at last to his berth. What a difference there had been between her and poor, foolish little Fannie! Bright lights and the hectic pleasure of gaudy restaurants and inane musical shows could hold little attraction for her sweet seriousness, and her modest reserve made the thought of indiscriminate flattery and admiration seem almost a profanation.

He had fallen hard for a pretty face, that was the trouble. It wasn't Fannie's fault that he had endowed

her with qualities she didn't possess. He looked back on his suffering when disillusionment came with a mixture of wonder and amused contempt, then with a pang there came the realization that this self-knowledge had come too late! If only he had been able to see Fannie as she really was, to understand the fundamental difference in their natures and to accept her refusal sensibly—if only he had never been so blind!

No matter what the future might hold he was beyond the pale now! He had been accused of the murder of a woman and not even confession on the part of the real culprit, had there actually been one, could wipe out the stain!

The roaring and swaying of the train seemed in accord with the tumult of his thoughts as he thumped his thin pillow restlessly. What a splendid girl Marian Gray seemed! How easy it was now to tell the real from the apparent worth! She wouldn't be capable of leading a fellow on for malicious amusement or the good times he could arrange for her, she wouldn't take without giving, pretend to a love she didn't even know the meaning of!

But why must he think of her? The dejection of the previous night returned, but he could not grasp its portent. What did it matter to him how splendid she was, except to be glad of the knowledge that there were girls like her in the world? He was through with all girls, all the hopes and dreams that another fellow might look forward to, sometime. They were not for him!

He fell into an uneasy sleep at length and awakened only when the porter summoned him, to dress hurriedly

in the half-light of early morning and presently descend to the bustling confusion of the busy station.

Fannie's brother kept a small store of some sort, and his home from which she had gone to the city was on Maple Street. That much he knew from what Sterett had told him of Mrs. Horton's interview with William Gillespie; he hadn't mentioned the matter to the landlady herself for fear that she would guess the object of his trip. There had been casual references to the house by Fannie which he remembered, and he was sure he would be able to recognize it.

It was still early. There would be time for him to get a shave and a cup of coffee and then catch William before he left to open his store for the day.

Henry checked his bag in the station and hurried out on the wide Main Street of the old-fashioned town, already alive with traffic in which farm wagons rubbed hubs with urban trucks, trolleys clattered, and the ubiquitous small car darted everywhere.

He found a barber shop, then a little lunchroom where, as he paid his check, he inquired the way to his destination. It was three streets over, tree-lined and shady, with immaculate sidewalks and prim hedges. Each small, neatly painted frame house sat smugly in the center of its patch of lawn, with stiff flower borders along the brick paths and plants in decorous pots ornamenting the porch steps.

They were as alike as peas in a pod, but the fourth from the corner, on the sunny side, boasted a cupola and a bulbous wing where the space above a bay window had

been thriftily built out. Fannie had spoken of the cupola and the added room, and—yes, there was the iron dog under the ailanthus tree!

A tall, awkward young man in his shirtsleeves, with pale, prominent blue eyes and sharp features, was hosing the porch steps, and Henry hesitated for a moment and then advanced up the path.

The man lowered the nozzle of the hose and stood awaiting him inquiringly and Henry noted with something of a shock the slight, indefinable resemblance to Fannie. Still he must be sure.

“Can you tell me where Mr. William Gillespie lives?”

“Here,” the man responded laconically, sweeping back with a bony, large-knuckled hand the mouse-colored hair slicked flatly down over his low forehead. “What you want with him?”

“If you are William Gillespie, I’ve come up from New York to have a little talk with you.” Henry stood still. “I am Jordan.”

“Jordan, hey!” Gillespie stared stupidly for a moment till he felt the water spraying over his shoes from the hose. “Feller that was arrested and set free t’other day?—Wait till I turn off this hose.”

He laid it down carefully so that the stream played into the rain-gutter beside the path, then proceeded to the spigot protruding from the foundation of the side wall, while Henry watched his slow, methodical movements in amazement. Could he have sprung from the same stock as the vivacious, frivolous Fannie?

“Now, then.” Gillespie approached him once more.

"No use tracking up the porch till it dries and my wife's busy out back, but you can come on to the garage with me while I get out the delivery truck; always go to the store in it, saves the boy's time while he's sweeping up."

His nasal tones were not especially friendly, neither did they betray any open hostility, and Henry followed in silence down the straight cement driveway that led back of the house and grape-arbor to the squat, jerry-built garage.

"Mr. Gillespie," he began, "as soon as I was free I made up my mind to come to you. I feel there's an explanation to be made; you're the only one of your family left to hear it and I am the only one who can give it to you."

Gillespie lifted the hood of the light delivery truck which occupied a full side of the small building, and then turned with a gesture toward a broken-backed chair.

"You can set there, if you like," he offered. "I don't know's there's any explanation due to me. I don't think you done it, if that's what you mean; my wife and I read the evidence real careful."

"I'm glad of that!" Henry cried quickly.

Gillespie shrugged.

"I calculate the police are satisfied now," he remarked. "I hope so! All this here scandal's been a terrible trial to my wife, and she was like to have a fit with the city reporters running here this week while your hearing was on! We didn't go nigh it because we couldn't do any good, not knowing anything, and Fan did enough to get our names in the papers as 'tis! It was real good of you

to come up and see me and I take it kindly, but we'd just as soon let it all drop now."

"Still, I want you to know how matters stood between your sister and me," Henry persisted. "I had asked her to be my wife, but we were both mistaken and realized it in time. I was hard hit at first, but I got over it and had only the most cordial feelings toward her at the last."

"Humph!" Gillespie pushed his limp hair back once more and eyed his visitor shrewdly. "I calculate you weren't the only one, down there to New York! There was a-plenty here, ever since Fan was old enough to have them fight over carrying her books home from school, and that's what spoiled her. She got to thinking the town boys weren't good enough for her, but she'd always been set on getting to the city; nothing would do for her but the bright lights and expensive clothes and gewgaws, and all the cabarettes and high doings she'd been reading about and heard tell of, and she got 'em! I calculate she kind of played fast and loose with more'n one young feller like you, without a notion of taking them serious and settling down, and you ain't to blame for the end of it. However it come about, 'twas the bright lights at the bottom of it!"

"But your sister never forgot you!" Henry threw as much warmth as possible into his voice. "She talked of you often to me and I think she didn't write because she felt you disapproved of her, but Mr. Gillespie, she was as charming and good as any girl who stayed at home!"

"We ain't ever doubted her, but Fan never would listen to reason." There was a softer note in the nasal tones. "I calculate I had something to do with spoiling her after our folks died; she had as good—and better—as any girl in town and I must have spent as much as three hundred dollars on her, all told, out of my share of the estate! Fan didn't have a notion of money except to spend it foolishly, and I'd ought to have kept a closer holt on her than I did."

"Mr. Gillespie, what do you think did happen?" asked Henry. He did not want to break the trend of reminiscence but felt obliged to force the issue. "Naturally, having cared for her once, I can't get the thought of your sister's death, and the manner of it, out of my mind. Do you think she killed herself? Would you ever have believed it possible?"

"I don't know anything about it!" Gillespie's lean jaw tensed. "Fan would no more have been likely to kill herself when she was living home than a kitten would, but nobody'd have murdered her here in Bison, either! I don't know what to think, one way or t'other, and I ain't going to express an opinion. We can't bring Fan back, and we can't expect folks to put it all out of their minds if we don't ourselves; that's what my wife says."

"Your wife——" Henry stopped and framed his sentence anew. "She didn't approve of her going to the city either?"

Gillespie stared.

"Tophet, no!" he ejaculated. "They didn't get along

together, from the first, for my wife's a sensible woman, saving and looking ahead, and soon's we were married she put a stop to my humoring Fan about clothes and parties we couldn't nowise afford. She tried to make Fan contented with plain things and a hullsome, busy life, but nothing influenced her except her hankering for lights and finery and excitement that my wife couldn't abide. Fan used to pore over the pictures of Broadway in the papers, with the big electric signs blazing like fireworks as if they'd bewitched her, and photographs of the wimmen all covered with di'monds and gewgaws made her crazy for 'em herself."

"Well," Henry began. "She was young and——"

"So's my wife!" Gillespie interrupted sententiously. "She don't get herself up like a circus woman, though! She had a fit over the things the landlady sent up here after the police give 'em back to her—Fan's duds and fake jewelry, I mean. The clothes wasn't the kind for a processed church-member—all thin silk and low-necked, with no sleeves to speak of, and heels like stilts on her slippers!"

"Lots of girls in New York dress like that," Henry ventured, but not too argumentatively. He would permit the other to run on in his own way since he appeared to be in a loquacious mood, and glean what he could.

"Then they ought to be spanked!" Gillespie commented. He reached into his pocket and produced a worn, leather-covered note-book. "As for those glass di'monds of hers, I've got a list here—nine different pieces! A hanging thing for her neck like a butter

plate, a big necklace, a pair of long earrings, a breast-pin, a bracelet and four rings with bunches of little stones in 'em. They were the worst! One stone alone wouldn't have been so bad on her finger, but all four of the rings just bristled with 'em! My wife was ashamed to have folks in town know about all that imitation stuff, but she thought it was sinful to keep it and have the good money it must have cost tied up, so I took it to a fancy store in Dunchester on my last trip and sold it, and it wasn't worth more'n chicken-feed! My wife said Fan must have been crazy, decking herself out like that, but then she always had funny notions, different from other girls; right from the time she was born there were queer things about her."

The high, nasal voice had rambled on as he put the note-book away, but now Henry's heart quickened a beat and he caught his breath.

"What sort of things, Mr. Gillespie?" He tried to speak half-indifferently, but there was a hushed, expectant note in his tones.

"Well, lights, for one thing," responded the other, unconscious of the impression he was making. "Most children are scared of the dark, I calculate, till they get it trained out of 'em, but with Fan it was something awful, and after a while the folks saw she couldn't help it, as if it had been born in her, and maybe 'twas! Darkness frightened her into convulsions when she was a baby; she'd sleep peaceful till the lamp was turned out and then wake right up and scream. She never got over it, either."

The thin voice seared like a tongue of flame into Henry's brain and he tried to speak but his throat seemed closed. There had been no light in Fannie's room when he followed the policeman who broke in the door! That nurse had testified to seeing the light go out suddenly. . . .

"Do you mean she always felt that way even when she grew up?" he managed to articulate at last. "Right up to the time she left home was there a light in her room at night while she slept?"

"Yes. That was the one thing my wife couldn't stop. She thought it was just foolishness and a sinful waste with kerosene costing what it does, and she used to sneak in at night and turn the lamp out to try to break her of it, but sure's she did Fan would open her eyes and shriek! Seem's if her brain was awake all the time watching that light! I calculate she was marked from birth that way."

Henry scarcely heard the last remark. The light which had been turned out in Fannie's room the night of her death had not awakened her! No outcry had followed! Her brain must then have been dormant in eternal sleep, her lips closed forever! Another's hand, not hers, had extinguished the gas, another's hand had first drawn that rope about her throat! Fannie had not killed herself, it was murder after all!

CHAPTER XVI

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

NO very clear memory ever afterward came to Henry of the passing of the next few hours. The significance of what he had learned from the inadvertent lips of William Gillespie, was so stupendous in its import, that it dwarfed every sensation and emotion that had come to him since the morning when the crime was revealed. With the last doubt swept away, the alternative which in spite of his intuitive conviction had dogged his steps now gone forever, his path was clear before him, albeit it lay in an unknown direction.

That he was no whit nearer discovering the identity of the murderer than when he had started upon his journey did not trouble him; now, with the possibility of suicide removed, nothing should halt him in his purpose! Somehow, the promise he had made to Judge Carberry should be kept to the letter!

When his stunned faculties rebounded from the effect of Gillespie's revelation his overwhelming impulse had been to get away, to shake the dust of Bison from his feet forever and rush back to the city, to the scene of the crime. Not here could there lie any clue to the wretch

who had taken Fannie's life, nor the motive which actuated him!

As soon as he decently could he took leave of her stolidly unconcerned brother, whose farewell to his unexpected visitor was as phlegmatic as his reception had been, and hurried back to the station. There he learned that the next through train to New York ~~would~~ not arrive until noon and he spent the intervening time in an aimless wandering about the small city and its environs, for inaction would have been unendurable in the seething excitement which consumed him.

Not so long ago Fannie herself in all her abounding youth and health had trod these same streets, attended this ornate high school still so aggressively new-looking, gone to these very shops and motion picture houses, perhaps even belonged to that gray, ivy-grown church over there! Behind each of these doors so smugly entrenched with hedges and terraced lawns must live those who had known her since babyhood; now she had been done to death cruelly, barbarously, and not one of them cared nor perhaps even gave her a thought except in half-disdainful pity for the weakness of her supposed suicide!

Henry found himself staring curiously at the passers-by, his own bitter self-consciousness of the two days since his liberation forgotten. Perhaps these young people had played with Fannie as children, envied her for getting away to the bright lights! The bright lights—and now eternal darkness was hers! There was no trace of sentiment, no memory of past emotion and pain in his mental attitude but genuine sorrow for the happy

young life so hideously ended and renewed allegiance to the cause he had undertaken. Fannie could not be brought back but she could be avenged; her murderer, whoever he was, must suffer to the fullest extent of the law for his crime!

When noon came at last and the train puffed laboriously out of the station, Henry settled himself with a sigh of vast relief in his seat. It would be midnight when he reached New York, too late to take any action, but already a vague plan was forming in his mind. Somewhere in their line of investigation the authorities as well as Lockwood Sterett must have overlooked some clue; so far as had appeared on the surface, so far as any of Fannie's past associates seemed aware, her existence had been an open book, and the fear she had betrayed, her increasing nervousness and apprehension might have been due solely to the threats of Frank Ward. Whether this were true or not, Henry's opinion of the race driver had not changed; the man was violent in his passions, primitive in retaliation for an affront from one of his own sex, but he was not the type to take physical revenge upon a woman, utterly incapable of a cowardly, cold-blooded murder!

Jack Rogers, the screen actor, would have been equally out of the question, viewing his character from a totally different standpoint, even if, as Mrs. Moffat had observed, he had not been wholly incapacitated during the period when the crime must have been perpetrated, by the beating he had received at Ward's hands.

Hands! As the word framed itself in Henry's mind

it brought with it a new thought. Those must have been strong hands indeed that tightened the rope about Fannie's slender throat; strong hands, and quick, and sure, to do their work so deftly and swiftly that the doomed girl had no opportunity to voice an appeal for help in that sudden, terrible extremity! Who among all those with whom she had been associated possessed such dexterity and strength?

The motive was buried in unfathomable obscurity, but a process of elimination would remove those for whom such an act would be an impossibility, saving precious time that might be spent otherwise in futile speculation. Henry realized that no one must be looked upon as above suspicion, however improbable their guilt would appear at a casual glance.

Rogers was out of it, but Ward possessed the strength and nerve and quickness of thought and action, after all! His profession evidenced that and, if disappointed love and hot-tempered threats had been a sufficiently logical and powerful motive for the authorities to attribute to Henry in his own case, it must be gravely considered in regard to another.

Strong hands and flexible! Who else possessed them? Who that had never yet been given the least thought? Since all those with whom Fannie appeared to have come in close enough contact to have aroused emotions of any sort were known to each other by hearsay at any rate, it stood to reason that Henry himself must know of the murderer, he might actually have been in his presence, heard him speak, touched his hand! It might be some

one he saw every day, like old Darley, who did have remarkable strength in spite of his fat, or Myrtle Harris, with her hands like grappling irons from ceaseless thrumming on the piano! Myrtle had always been envious of Fannie, jealous of her girlhood and piquant prettiness, and the unspoiled vivacity and charm which had won her so much admiration, and Simmy Darley had paid his middle-aged court and been flouted, perhaps with unconscious, heedless cruelty, but these two were manifestly beyond consideration on any score and Henry dismissed them with a shrug at the fantastic idea.

The rest of the immediate household were equally exempt, of course, but who remained of Fannie's former friends or associates? No woman could have broken into the house, nor, even if one had conceived a motive, would she have chosen such a method to gain her ends. What man, therefore, remained?

Throughout the long afternoon and during his solitary meal in the dining car, Henry pondered long and fruitlessly, but later in the smoker a fresh possibility occurred to his mind; Benjamin Newell! That sleek young showman had given an impression of good-natured vulgarity on the witness stand and appeared sincere alike in his admiration for Fannie and his disclaimer of any sentiment in his regard for her, but what had actually passed between them? How long and well had Fannie known him, and what motive if any could be assigned to him?

What did any one know of the man? That he owned a concession called "the avalanche ride" at a beach resort and had shown occasional but not marked attention to

Fannie; that was all. There was nothing either suspicious or reassuring in that, but he belonged to a world as far removed from those of the race driver and screen actor as theirs were equi-distant. He might be able to furnish a clue, voluntarily or unconsciously, and Henry resolved to interview him at the earliest possible moment.

To-morrow would be Saturday, and that and the day following were the busiest and most crowded of all the week at such a resort. Newell would be likely to give him scant attention, if indeed he succeeded in getting the ear of the amusement purveyor, but by the same reckoning Monday would be the slowest of the seven, with fewer visitors and less prospect of patrons for the "ride."

On Monday, therefore, Henry would go to Knickerbocker Beach and have a talk with the debonair Newell, but in the meantime there were two days in which to cover other fields.

Could he carry on his investigations to their conclusion without the authorities getting wind of his activities and purpose? They would not relish interference, especially from such a source, in the event that they had decided to drop the case, but he must chance that. He felt indifferent now to what those of Mrs. Horton's household would think if they learned of his search. Nothing mattered but to find the murderer!

Midnight came and the train drew into the Grand Central Station while Henry was still buried in his thoughts. How glad he'd be to get back to Mrs. Horton's! It seemed a year since he had been away, longer

almost, than all those torturing days awaiting the action of the grand jury. He smiled faintly at the idea. Why in the world should he feel this way? It was home to him there, of course, but nothing was changed, nothing was different than the first time he went away last spring. The same faces—and one more!

Marian Gray! His thoughts lingered over the name. It was just like her, somehow; sweet but dignified with no frills about it, no possibility of abbreviation to a silly, frivolous nickname. She would have been asleep long ago, but in the morning he should see her, talk to her, if only for a moment before she left for work. Would she be glad that he was back again?

He shouldered his way through the clamoring taxi chauffeurs and boarded a cross-town car, then walked up the few blocks to his destination, still thinking of the girl he had met for the first time only two evenings before. Why should she care whether he came or went? He was only a stranger who had been through much trouble and her nature had prompted her to be kind to him, just as she would be to anybody whom she felt to have suffered unjustly, but she couldn't have any more personal interest in him.

The house was silent, with only a dim light glowing in the hall as Henry opened the door with his key. He lowered the lamp and tiptoed up the stairs to his own room. How still the house was and how good it felt to be home once more! He was healthily tired and his mind was at peace. To-morrow he would begin his search anew with redoubled energy and determination. To-morrow, too,

he would see Marian Gray again, talk with her, watch the color come and go in her cheeks, her eyes turn from blue to deepest violet! He didn't attempt to analyze his feelings, he only knew that he'd missed her, wanted her as he had never wanted to see any one in his life before, and he fell asleep with a smile on his worn face.

The rain was pattering hard against the upper sash of the window when he awakened, splashing in through the opened lower one to drench the chair on which he had carelessly thrown his coat the night before. No matter; it needed pressing anyway after that train trip! Henry whistled blithely as he tubbed and dressed; leaden skies and summer rain didn't make any difference, and the storm wouldn't interfere with his plans for the afternoon. Perhaps Marian Gray wouldn't go to business that morning, and they could have a good talk. . . .?

When he descended to the dining-room, however, she was already there with a becoming little brown turban covering her shining hair.

She favored him with a smile and a little exclamation of pleasure.

"Oh, when did you return, Mr. Jordan? I'm sure Mrs. Horton didn't expect you so soon!"

"I didn't want to stay away over Sunday," he replied lamely. How purple her eyes were, like pansies, this morning! "I'm glad I decided to come back; I think the country is gloomy in the rain, don't you?"

"No-o," she dissented with a smile. "Perhaps I'm prejudiced, for I've lived there nearly all my life, but I love the rain pattering on the roof and dripping from

the eaves; it makes the garden smell so good, too, and everything looks so fresh and clean afterwards. Did you have a nice trip?"

"A satisfactory one; a little matter of business that I finished sooner than I expected." He scarcely knew what he replied. In a sentence she had brought back to him the rainy days of long ago down in that Pennsylvania village before ever he came to the city. It was odd he'd never thought of them all these years! She belonged in a garden, this gentle, demure girl!

"Somebody come to see you yesterday," Agnes' thin tones broke in upon his musing as she placed before him a steaming bowl of oatmeal. "A Mr. Newell, it was."

"'Newell!'" Henry exclaimed in surprise. "What did he want, do you know? What time did he come?"

"Late, around six o'clock," she replied to his last question first. "He didn't tell me his business, Mr. Jordan; just left a card for you and said would you look him up beginning of next week if you got back? I put it here, somewhere."

She crossed to the sideboard and returned with a card which bore in very heavy print the admonition: "Ride the Avalanche! Slide down the Mountain on a giant Snowbank! See Farms and Villages Crumple in Ruins in your Path and Sweep out on a Grassy Plain! Thrills! THRILLS!" Modestly in the left-hand corner appeared "Benjamin Newell, Prop.," with "The Rialto, Knickerbocker Beach," below the name.

Newell! Was it chance or fate that the concessionaire should have come to him? Henry could not imagine

what his errand might have been, but he would not waste time in speculation. Saturday was a big day at the resorts—if the weather was clear! To-day in the pelting storm the Beach would be a deserted wilderness, its gaudy decorations draggled and blare silenced, with none to feel the allure of the printed invitation. If Newell lived in or near the resort he might shut up shop on such an unpromising day and come to the city, in which event it behooved Henry to hurry; his other plan could wait, he must see this man at once!

As he slipped the card into his pocket he glanced up to meet Marian's eyes fixed upon him with a shade of concern in their depths, and smiled.

"Newell is one of the witnesses who testified this week, you know," he explained casually. "Can't imagine what he wants; I never met him."

"I read what he said," Marian responded quietly. "It's really too bad they don't let you alone, isn't it? Why can't they realize you've been through enough?"

"I don't mind! In fact, I rather wanted to see this fellow, I think there's something he can tell me." Henry checked himself suddenly and drained his coffee cup to hide his confusion. Had he given himself away? He added hastily: "Of course I'll be interested in—in the case until it is finally settled."

"Of course," she nodded. "Your vindication was just but it was not the whole duty of justice, was it? That remains still to be done.—You will excuse me? I am afraid I shall be late."

She rose almost precipitately and he watched her

slender, graceful figure as she adjusted the fur about her neck and moved to the door. How well she understood, and how perfectly she had expressed the situation! Justice was lagging, but it should be performed; the duty that still remained must be fulfilled!

CHAPTER XVII

TREASURE TROVE

SHEETS of rain sweeping down on gray sand and a huddled regiment of bathhouses; on narrow streets of fantastic booths hung with crude, garish banners and streamers, on gaunt skeletons of scenic railways and great swings, on the tarnished tinsel trappings of wooden horses prancing stiffly in a circle, on multitudes of electric light bulbs as whitely opaque as sightless eyes! A fairyland of pleasure touched with the wand of bleak reality; Knickerbocker Beach in the storm!

A beetle-browed individual lounging morosely behind the counter of a shooting gallery directed Henry to the Rialto and he plodded along heedless of the puddles but shivering in the mackintosh he had donned in place of the spring overcoat which had gone to the tailor's. Why hadn't he told Agnes to remind the boy he would need it back that night? What if Newell weren't around and he had taken this cold, soaking, dismal trip for nothing?

Where in the world was the fool contraption called The Avalanche Ride? The whole place was a sordid, wretched mockery, as hollow and unwholesome as the craving for excitement to which it pandered! What had Newell come to him for, anyway? If he had any suspicions or theories wouldn't he naturally have taken them

to the police? He had no reason, from the evidence at the hearing alone, to lead him to think that Henry himself was further interested, he had no way of knowing——.

All at once he caught sight of a giant structure looming above and behind a wide-spreading, luridly painted canvas screen, on which were depicted scenes of appalling disaster such as the card had briefly mentioned. Henry did not need the flaring signs in front to acquaint him with what awaited within, for the structure of towering framework beyond was cunningly covered with gleaming plaster to represent snow and shaped like a straightaway toboggan slide, the wide, moderately steep slope dotted with miniature farmhouses and toy villages.

More convincing than all, however, was the appearance in the turnstile entrance of a keen-faced, dapper young man in the late twenties, with sleek dark hair and a jaunty carriage of his narrow shoulders that Henry remembered. He quickened his pace, the temporary ill-humor forgotten, and Benjamin Newell started forward with a smile which revealed an opulent gold tooth.

"That's the boy!" He shook hands with an unexpected strength and vigor which made Henry wince. "That hash-slinger where you hang out didn't think you'd be back before next week, but the sooner, the better! Ain't this one bird of a day—not! I stand to lose a nice little piece of change, but I'm not worrying; having one good summer, I'll tell the world! Come on inside and we'll talk business."

"'Business?'" echoed Henry as he followed Newell

into a six-by-six office at the right of the entrance. What business could this enterprising show proprietor have to do with him? "I was given your card and message this morning, and it looking like an off day I thought I'd run out and see what you wanted me to look you up about."

"Good enough!" Newell dragged forward a stool and seating himself on its mate beside the ticket window he produced a seal cigarette case decorated with prongs of green-gold. "Have a drag?—Listen, Jordan. I ain't going to waste any time talking about what you've been up against; the bulls was looking for a big play and you was the goat, but they couldn't put you through because it wasn't there! Get me? Now, here's my way of looking at it. It was a damned raw deal, but if you take it right you ain't altogether out of luck. When you get a hook on the jaw like that, don't lie there thinking how much it hurts and is gonna spoil your looks for the future, but get up before the count! This ain't no parson's spiel, it's rock-bottom sense! You've had a jolt. All right; don't be thin-skinned about it. Make it pay you! Play the cards as they lay! Get the idea?"

Henry laughed, but he flushed slightly as he shook his head.

"Can't say I do, Newell, but it's good of you to be interested——"

"'Good,' nothing; it's business!" the other interrupted briskly. "You've been handed something a guy like you won't want, but it'd be striped candy to me, and I'll be willing to pay real kale if you'll lend it to me for as long as it lasts. It's jake right now, and good for the season,

anyway, and that's notoriety! You've got publicity; that's the real thing! Capitalize it, make it hand you a dividend, don't bury it! Put a fence around it and charge admission! You're a martyr, see? Next to knocking, there's nothing the public likes so much as to turn on the maudlin sympathy, and if it's money in the bank to you, let 'em rave!"

Henry straightened and his flush deepened. What was this brutally frank confidence worker trying to suggest?

Before he could speak, Newell read his expression and went on quickly.

"Don't get me wrong, Jordan! I ain't a low-life, kicking a guy when he feels down; I'm just putting it to you straight, from a business slant. Here's my prop. For the ten weeks before Carnival, I'll give you two-fifty, and three-fifty a-piece for the two weeks Carnival lasts. Maybe I can use you for a while after that on the Southern wheel or, if you make good in the business on your own account, I can keep you on with me, give you a share. If not, thirty-two hundred won't be bad pickings till you can ease yourself into another job, and all you'll have to do will be to ballyhoo, like the bunk on that card I left for you. I'll do the rest. What do you say?"

Henry's indignation cooled and he began to be amused. After all, Newell wasn't a bad fellow according to his lights. He was proposing to exploit the hideous suffering and degradation of which his caller was so bitterly conscious, but as he had stated candidly it was sheer business to him and he had offered a fair deal. He was of the caliber to make capital of the hanging of his own

grandmother, should such an opportunity arise, and Henry privately thought it not unlikely. Aloud, he said:

"I'll confess it hadn't struck me I'd acquired a new market value, Newell, and though your terms are more than fair I can't say it listens very good to me. I'd feel like a side-show freak! You mean you'd want me to stand out in front here and gather in the crowd?"

"That's the idea! You won't carry any signs or placards, but they'll stop for a look at you—I'll see to that!—and then you hand 'em the same old come-on spiel with any snappy new stuff you want to spring. If it's a hot day—and we're due for a lot of scorchers in the next two months—loud pedal on the snow, and if there's a raw wind blowing in from the sea give 'em the horrors good and strong; houses crushed, folks buried alive, whole villages wiped out! Put the tremolo into it! I went to hear you pull your own stuff on the stand Wednesday, and believe me, boy, when you get warmed up to it you ought to bring 'em in like a revival!"

Henry shook his head, smiling.

"I'll think it over and let you know," he promised. "I'm not exactly looking for a job, Newell, though it's mighty decent of you to offer me this. I've been with my firm ever since I quit school and I wasn't thinking of leaving."

Newell stared, the butt of the cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth.

"Ain't you tumbled yet that you'll be canned?" There was a compassionate note in his voice. "I hate like hell to wise you up, but I figured you had guessed it! You're

a big drawing card for me, but that grand jury business ain't gonna help you to sell fancy office furniture, and when you show up at the works you'll get a lot of sympathy, but a new guy'll have your order book! Better come in with me."

"My job is still open." Henry decided to give no definite refusal now to the other's proposition. His own purpose was uppermost in his mind and he wanted Newell to talk but hesitated to broach the subject. "The firm hired Sterett to look after my interests, you know, and he gave me their assurance that I could come back."

"That's just to save their faces," Newell shook his head cynically. "They may take you on again for a few weeks, but they'll trump up some bunk or other to let you out, sure. It was white of them to sign up Sterett for you, though! He's a whizz-bang! If he was in my line he'd rake 'em in high, wide, and pretty! They had you framed for a goal!"

This was the opening for which Henry had been waiting.

"It looked that way, didn't it? I couldn't believe, myself, that Fannie Gillespie had killed herself. You testified that she hadn't any notion of it the last time you saw her."

"Hell, no!" the other ejaculated. "Unless she went cuckoo all of a sudden, Fannie never took the Big Jump. She was the livest wire I ever knew and happy as a kid at a circus all the time! It was a good thing for me I wasn't dippy enough to let myself think she'd hitch up with me! I was all right to chase around with and show

her the bright lights, and she could trust me to be a good pal, but nix on the husband stuff and I knew it! A carnival circuit is no place for a girl unless she's been raised in the business and I don't figure to quit for a skirt, but I sure liked that little lady, and admired her down to the ground!—I guess you'd rather I shut my trap, though."

He paused with a trace of embarrassment in his voice, but Henry replied hastily:

"No, it does me good! What I told on the stand was the truth; I was cured weeks before that terrible thing happened, and I'm not going around grouching about it now, but I'd give a lot to have the mystery of it cleared up."

"So would I!" Newell struck the counter behind the ticket window a resounding slap. "It's the queerest thing I ever heard of! I'm glad it don't make you feel bad to talk about it, for I don't mind telling you I can't get it out of my head. It knocked me cold, like I said, when I read what had happened to her, and then on top of it that you'd been run in on suspicion of croaking her! I didn't know what to think, but as the evidence against you leaked out, it didn't look so much to me. I'd have written notes a lot stronger if I'd been turned down as raw as that, and they hadn't anything else to hang on you. When I got subpoenaed and went to testify at the hearing, I took a good look at you and knew then there was nothing to it, and your own story cinched it the next day. I've been wanting to talk the whole thing over with you ever since.—Jordan, unless that little girl went off her nut she didn't do it, but who did?"

"That's what I've been asking myself!" Henry shrugged. "She didn't tell you any more than you repeated? That last night you took her out, I mean, when you went to the Venetian Gardens?"

"Not a thing! Just that a guy was acting ugly because she wouldn't marry him, and he'd got her going, for she didn't know what he might pull off."

"I see. That might have applied to me as well as to Frank Ward, only I'd got over it," remarked Henry. "I thought she might have said something else. She might have had something on her mind besides a jealous, disappointed admirer."

"Lord knows!" exclaimed Newell soberly. After a moment he broke out: "It don't seem like her! She never could have got into any trouble so deep there was only one way out, and as for making herself miserable over anybody else so that she wouldn't want to go on living—well, it just ain't in the cards! She was only a big, happy kid, and didn't stop to think she might be handing a guy a rotten deal. We was just made to stick around and give her a good time, and she sure could enjoy herself! I remember the day she came down here—first Sunday we opened—and she had the time of her young life even before she found the ring in the sand!"

"She found a ring?" Henry repeated.

"Sure she did! It was a bird, too, enough like the real thing to fool most guys! Didn't she tell you about it?" Newell looked his surprise and then added: "That's a hot one! I forgot you wasn't speaking much!—Well, I'd asked her to come out and have lunch at The Grotto;

that's the swell new place down on the beach front where the waiters are dressed like fishermen and you net your own lobsters and haul in live fish all out of a big tank. It tickled Fannie to death and I couldn't hardly get her back to the table before she grabbed the whole catch! She had on a little green dress, I remember, and a hat with spring flowers on it, and looked like a million bucks if you didn't get too good a slant at all that fake junk she would trick herself out in!"

"I remember," Henry nodded absently. He was impatient for the other to go on but wisely let him continue his reminiscence in his own fashion.

"It was a big day with us, but I got another guy to run the Ride for me, and she came out bright and early. Nothing would do but I must take her on every last stunt in the whole Park, me that grew up with all the bunk, but I got a new line on it just by watching the fun she was having! After lunch we went down on the beach; it was pretty early to go in, but we sat down on the sand and lamped the rest, and that was when she found the ring. We was talking and laughing and she was digging deep in the sand and letting it run through her fingers, when all of a sudden she let out a little squeal and began brushing off something she'd uncovered. It was a ring with a single great big stone in it, and when the sun struck it, it glittered like a headlight turned on full! Say, there'd have been nothing to it if it had been real! I know sparklers, and that was the size of three carats at least, blue-white and cut like the genuwine article. An average good three-carat diamond now is worth be-

tween three hundred and three-fifty a carat, so Fannie might have dug up well over a grand, but her luck wasn't running that strong. The ring was phony, I seen that, but I had to look good before I'd believe it, for the setting itself was mighty fine work and of some kind of white metal that was the nearest thing to platinum I ever lamped.

"Fannie was as happy, though, as if it had come straight from a swell jeweler's, and it didn't cloud up none for her when I told her it was fake! It was just as pretty to her, and that's all she cared about; she was like that. I will say it looked grand on her finger when she'd stripped off the other junk that was like dirty glass beside it, and she kept flashing it in the sun and exclaiming over it all the way back here to the Ride. The crowd was getting so thick I had to take hold myself, but she didn't mind, she just got on the avalanche and stayed on! I guess she slid down it forty times, and was having just as much fun at the last as the first time! I took a flash at her once or twice when her car came in on the rollers for a fresh load and she waved to me and stuck out the ring as proud as a little peacock!

"The mob thinned around six for awhile and I took her to dinner, and then sent her home on a sight-seeing bus run by a guy I knew would look out for her. She said she'd come out again the next Sunday, but in the meantime I dated her up for a show Wednesday night." Newell drew a deep breath and for a moment gazed out through the little window at the rain which had settled into a dull, monotonous drizzle. Then he concluded:

"We went, all right, and that was the last time I saw her. When the next Sunday came she was dead!—I tell you, Jordan, if some guy did croak her I'd like to get a chance at him, that's all! There'd be an inquest instead of a hearing, if I did!"

"Then they'd try to indict you, but you'd get off easier than I did." Henry rose slowly. "I'm glad to have had this talk with you, Newell, and I'll let you know to-morrow about taking up that proposition of yours. Thanks for offering it, anyway."

"Better think it over good before you turn it down," the other advised as he held out his hand once more. "It'll be a big day to-morrow if the storm lets up, and I can use you right off the bat by getting out some hand-bills in a hurry. Phone me the minute you make up your mind. You'll get the spiel in no time. So long!"

All the way back in the train Henry's mind was groping vaguely but industriously for something which seemed to elude him. Fannie had found a ring, "enough like the real thing to fool most guys"; a huge, single stone, a solitaire! Where was it now?

CHAPTER XVIII

"NO QUESTIONS ASKED"

WHAT had become of Fannie's find? Ceaselessly the question pounded into Henry's brain during luncheon, home at Mrs. Horton's, and later, when he paced his room in profound thought.

He wasn't quite sure that the fact he had gleaned fitted anywhere in the grim puzzle, but it was the second salient point and he clung to it until he should have finally placed it. Fannie couldn't endure the dark, yet in darkness she had been found at the last; she had by chance come into possession of a huge solitaire ring just a few days before her death and had been manifestly delighted with it, yet when the end came it seemed to have disappeared. Was there any connection between the two apparently unrelated facts?

Newell had professed to know diamonds and he said it was an imitation capable of deceiving most people; had it deceived some one? In the confusion following the discovery of the tragedy, had some one yielded to temptation and taken the ring before Stevenson had gathered Fannie's effects together?

As plainly as though they had just been uttered, Henry heard William Gillespie's words ringing again in his ears as he described the poor little trinkets which had so

disgusted his wife. ". . . and four rings with bunches of little stones in 'em. They were the worst! One stone alone wouldn't have been so bad on her finger, but all four of the rings just bristled with 'em!" Clearly he had never received the one with the single imitation diamond, and it was unlikely that Fannie had disposed of it before her death when she had been so enchanted with it. It was equally impossible that it could have disappeared while in the hands of the authorities or when transferred to Mrs. Horton for shipment with the girl's other personal possessions to her only relative.

Who then had stolen it? What a jolt it must have given them when they tried to sell it and learned it was only paste, after all! They might have known better than to suppose a girl of Fannie's position would have a jewel worth in the neighborhood of a thousand dollars! But if the thief were some one who knew Fannie, or had heard the story of how the ring had come into her possession, they might readily assume that it was a genuine diamond and she herself ignorant of the truth.

Then a fresh thought flashed across his mind, and it was Henry who received the jolt. What if they had been right in their surmise and the jewel was real? Newell was not an expert and he might well have been mistaken in his cocksure judgment. He admitted that it "glittered like a headlight," that he had to look closely before he would believe it was "phony," for it was cut like "the genuwine article" and the setting the nearest thing to platinum he ever saw.

Fannie would naturally have taken his word for it,

and that it would matter little to her whether the stone were real or false as long as it delighted her eye, Henry could well believe. Stranger things had happened, greater treasure had been resurrected from seaside sands before this, and such a resort as Knickerbocker Beach drew rich as well as poor of a certain pleasure-loving type. Had keener eyes than hers or those of the proprietor of the avalanche discovered the truth and taken advantage of the opportunity so horribly presented?

What if the opportunity had been made? Henry halted in his ceaseless pacing and a cold sweat broke out upon him. Murder had been committed for less, and if that were indeed the motive it would explain many facts which had been maddeningly inconsistent and obscure. Yet the sheer horror of it shook him to his very soul and he felt as though in the grip of some hideous malady that turned his blood to water and made his senses reel! Had poor little Fannie's happy find been the innocent cause of her death? It was too frightful to believe and still the thought could not be driven from his mind, but instead it took a more tenacious hold upon him with each passing minute. He must prove or disprove it at all costs!

The first step would be to satisfy himself as to the genuineness of the diamond, but how could that be accomplished since it had disappeared? It might have been washed ashore from some shipwreck after an indefinite lapse of time, but more likely some one had lost it in the same manner as that in which it had been found again. In that case would the loser not have tried to recover a

jewel of such great value? What would be the most logical means that would suggest itself, the almost universal means to accomplish such an end?

With an inarticulate exclamation Henry seized his hat and dashed down the stairs, hurrying out into the rain with a blank disregard for his appearance, and seething with inward excitement. In twenty minutes he was in the office of a newspaper publishing house far downtown, feverishly going over the files for the preceding May. Fannie's body had been discovered on Friday, the twentieth. The preceding Sunday had therefore been the fifteenth. It was the opening of the resort, but the ring might conceivably have been lost a day or two before. It was more likely, however, that it had occurred that morning, since it had remained so near the surface of the sand, and Fannie had discovered it that afternoon.

Henry turned to the "Lost and Found" columns for Monday, the sixteenth, and scanned them carefully, but although the advertisements inserted by anxious owners were numerous, the articles whose return was sought were none of great intrinsic value and his spirit sank. Perhaps some other paper had been chosen as a medium, perhaps he was making a mountain out of a molehill and Newell's estimate of the ring was correct, after all! Yet there was a bare chance that the loss had not been immediately discovered or for some reason the insertion of a published appeal been delayed.

Henry tried the issue for Tuesday, the seventeenth, and ran his eye slowly down the line. Great Danes and Pekinese, Chows and mongrels—had all the dogs in town

vanished on the same day? Cats, too, a canary, furs, brief-cases, even umbrellas and books, were interlarded with the piteously optimistic pleas for the return of shabby purses containing tragically small sums. The jewelry at last! A bracelet, a platinum bag, wrist watches, brooches—— . . .

All at once a few lines in larger type caught his attention as though printed in letters of living fire! Then maddeningly the page wavered and blurred before his eyes and his heart seemed to cease beating. He waited in an agony until his vision cleared and the paragraph stood out once more.

“Lost. Knickerbocker Beach, Sunday. Solitaire diamond ring. Three hundred dollars’ reward paid for information leading to its return. No questions asked. Apply Apartment 60, The Belgravia, Park Avenue.”

Henry read the brief advertisement over and over, although that second glance had rivetted it on his brain for all time. He could scarcely believe his good fortune, for many people used merely their initials and the address of a local branch office of the newspaper, and there had been, too, a not remote chance that the loser was one of the vast floating population patronizing one or another of the hotels, and after such an interval could not easily be located.

He knew the Belgravia, as it happened. A prominent financier whose suite of offices he had furnished resided there in state, and he remembered it as one of the most palatial of the mammoth apartment houses flanking that avenue of stupendous opulence. Homes there were held

only on leases that insured permanency and any one living in the Belgravia in the preceding May would in all probability be still in residence, or, if traveling, their address known. They would be unlikely possessors or advertisers of false jewels—but what would a denizen of the Belgravia be doing at a plebeian resort such as Knickerbocker Beach?

The thought did not dampen Henry's enthusiasm, however, and he set out on his quest, as heedless as before of his umbrella-less state in the driving storm. He hailed the first taxi he encountered and drove into the great, square inner court of the towering structure almost before he had formulated his mode of procedure.

As it was, he found it no easy matter to gain admittance without stating his errand and at last he was forced to give a partial explanation to the gorgeously attired major domo who blocked his way.

"Tell the lady who occupies Apartment Sixty that I have called to see her in reference to a private matter, a loss which she sustained last spring," he announced. "I must see her in person, or a confidential representative."

Obviously impressed by his choice of phrase the resplendent retainer bowed and vanished, to reappear after an interval and escort him to a private entrance and a tiny elevator of breath-taking elegance which whirled him noiselessly up to the sixth floor and directly into a spacious hallway.

Henry received a vague impression of many mirrors, silken panels and hangings, and soft lights dispelling the

gloom, and then a small, suavely smiling Japanese butler stood before him and escorted him to an intimate little apartment, half boudoir and half reception room, where a lady rose with ill-concealed eagerness to greet him.

She was very tall, very blonde, and very beautiful, with a regal carriage and an air of gracious condescension, yet a glance sufficed to explain the Knickerbocker Beach episode. Panoplied with every borrowed attribute of wealth, it was patent that this charming personage was not to the manner born, and her announcement proclaimed it to Henry.

"I am Mrs. Culliver. You wished to see me, I believe."

Mrs. Culliver! Old Jeremiah Culliver, the coal baron, had startled society and furnished much material for the Sunday supplements more than a year before, by marrying the daughter of one of the humble comrades of his earlier days in the collieries, and great had been the stress laid by the more socialistic organs on the fact that Mary Murdo Culliver was a child of the people.

Henry bowed.

"I want to see you, Mrs. Culliver, if you are the lady who advertised a certain loss in the papers on the sixteenth of last May," he replied.

"A ring? A diamond solitaire?" she asked quickly. "Sit down, Mr.——?"

"Jones," he supplied, gravely. "Will you describe the ring to me, please?"

The lady's eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"Suppose you describe to me the ring you—have in

mind," she suggested. "If you can produce it I'll raise the reward to five hundred, but not a penny more! My husband knows about it now, so it doesn't matter so much, and you won't dispose of it easily elsewhere, for word has gone out to watch for it."

Henry flushed and then laughed in sheer amusement.

"I remember. 'No questions asked,' " he said. "You think I stole it, Mrs. Culliver? My assurance that I did not would no doubt be useless, and anyway it is immaterial. There is a chance, however, that I may be able to regain it for you or let you know where it is, and that is the only point at issue. You may incur some expense in getting possession of it again, but the reward doesn't interest me."

Mrs. Culliver looked at him long and keenly and then colored slightly in her turn.

"I beg your pardon. I thought, you see—I mean, you must have some object, of course, in coming to me with information now after all these months, and I never have understood how I came to lose that ring! The diamond was three and a half carats, a beautiful blue-white stone and very brilliant. It wasn't worth much in comparison to the rest of my jewels; I have rings valued at ten times as much and more, but I set a lot of store—that is, I thought a great deal of it because of associations. It was foolish of me to wear it down to the Beach that day, but I hadn't any idea of going there when I left home—however, that doesn't matter. I know I had it on when I started out and never missed it until I returned and prepared to dress for dinner. If you have such a ring, or

know where it is, I'll make it worth your while to tell me, even if you don't want the money, Mr. Jones!"

She emphasized the name, but Henry did not heed. Instead he responded gravely:

"It will be worth my while if you will tell me all the circumstances under which you lost it, Mrs. Culliver. I can't promise positively to recover it for you, but I think there is a good chance of it, or I should not have intruded this afternoon."

"You didn't come just for the pleasure of telling me that." She hesitated. "You saw my advertisement, of course?"

"Only to-day, when I looked for it in old newspaper files," he explained. "I never guessed the very existence of the ring until this morning.—But do you care to tell me about it?"

"If you really have a chance of getting it back, but I'm sure I don't understand you!" Mrs. Culliver shrugged. "I left the house about ten o'clock in the morning, I remember, and drove out in one of my cars with a guest from my home town, an old friend of the family. He had heard that Knickerbocker Beach was opening for the season that day and suggested that we run out and see what it was like. It wasn't the sort of place that would amuse my husband, but I—thought it might be interesting as a curiosity, and agreed. It was quite awful, though, and after going in one or two of the rides and things we were bored and disgusted with the crowd, so we went down to the beach and sat on the sand for awhile."

"You wore gloves?" Henry asked.

"Of course!" Mrs. Culliver stared and then understood. "Oh, I did take them off while we sat there and played with the sand, and I did not put them on again till we were back in the car, so I thought that in that jostling mob as we literally fought our way back to the parking space somebody must have—Oh, do you mean I lost it in the sand?"

"You didn't discover it was gone when you were putting on your gloves?" Henry ignored her question.

"No. We lunched at a little inn on the way home, and then some people dropped in for tea, and so it wasn't until just before dinner that I missed it. I didn't know what to do at first, for I hadn't meant to mention the place to my husband; he would have thought it too—too common, and so it is, I suppose, but I hadn't looked at it that way before! I didn't make up my mind to advertise until the next day, and I hoped he wouldn't see it, but one of his interfering secretaries——!" She paused, biting her lips. "That's all I can tell you, Mr. Jones. If you can locate it for me let me know."

Henry took his departure with the dread conviction strengthening with every passing moment. He had discovered the motive for Fannie Gillespie's murder!

CHAPTER XIX

A DAWNING HOPE

“**H**OWDY, there!” A low but cordial voice hailed Henry from the bottom step of the stairs as, weary and drenched, he let himself into the house late that night. “I’ve been missing you for the last twenty-four hours, somehow or other, Henry! That’s why I’m waylaying you now. I’ve got a little medicine here for you.”

Edgar North had risen and Henry held out his hand with a tired but welcoming smile.

“Gee, I’m glad to see you, Ed! Come on up to my room; it’s pretty late, but we can talk low.”

He led the way on tip-toe and the other followed noiselessly, closing the door of Henry’s bedroom with the merest click of the catch.

“Here you are.” He held up a squat little earthenware jug from the top of which a half inch of swollen cork protruded, caked with dust. “Take a little drop of this before we begin, it’ll keep the dampness from your bones! See, it’s never been opened since I brought it No’t with me.”

“Humph!” Henry glanced about helplessly with a rueful smile. “Corkscrews have gone out of fashion lately

and I never got my knife back, you know. No persuasion will get that cork out, North!"

"Won't it? You fetch me that little glass over there. "One slim hand tightened about the neck of the jug and the fingers of the other like steel pliers twisted the cork loose and drew it out. Henry watched the dark, syrupy fluid gurgle into the glass and then raised it to his lips.

"'Medicine?' " he queried with a little chuckle as the fiery warmth stole tingling through his veins.

"That's what my grandmother calls it." Ed's dark eyes twinkled. "She makes it out of right pretty little berries, and never can understand that the Almighty does something to it after she has finished!—But why didn't you come up to my room last night? If I'd thought you were coming back home so soon——!"

"I didn't want to wake up the house," Henry explained. He hadn't even remembered his compact with Ed last night and now he almost regretted having made it, much as he liked the other. He felt a disinclination to take any one into his confidence now. A secretiveness hitherto foreign to him had been born with his latest discovery and he felt that he must pursue it alone. "I thought you'd be at breakfast——"

"You had gone long before I came down," Ed interrupted. "I lunched out and no one mentioned your return until this afternoon. Then you didn't come in to dinner and so I've been waiting. Did you learn anything up where you went?"

"Only enough to make me more sure that it—it wasn't suicide." He couldn't bring himself to mention the miss-

ing ring, somehow. The thing was too stupendous; it had dovetailed so miraculously into what he had found out that day that he couldn't talk about it yet. "William is a stingy, narrow-minded hick and under the thumb of a wife who must be a holy terror! He doesn't dare call his soul his own, but I think he was fond of his sister in a sneaking kind of way. He reminiscenced a lot—just little, trivial things about Fannie's growing-up days, but they showed me that I'd thought what was true about her; she never had it in her to kill herself, no matter what had happened."

Ed had listened attentively, but there was frank disappointment in his expression.

"Is that all?" he asked. "Lord, man, that isn't anything! You thought that before you went up there, but it isn't proof! Miss Fannie may have changed a heap since she came to New York. If somebody did break in and kill her, did you get any kind of a notion from your confab with her brother as to who it might have been?"

"No." Henry admitted. He wouldn't say anything about the light either, he decided; not till the whole thing was finished and he could tell it all to his partner. "I haven't the slightest idea, even now, who it might have been, but I know it was somebody else, not Fannie herself, and I'm not going to give up till I get to the bottom of it!"

"We won't, Henry!" Ed threw back his head defiantly. "If you say it was murder, we won't rest till we've found the man who did it and hand him over to the

law!—Did you know that showman came to see you yesterday afternoon? Benjamin Newell, Miss Fannie's friend?"

"Yes!" Henry laughed. He was on safe ground here and the determination was growing to keep his knowledge to himself, for it was only too plain that the other privately believed in the suicide theory. With that in the back of his mind, he would only hinder and not help, in spite of his good intentions. "What do you think Newell wanted? To offer me a job!"

"You?" Ed raised his eyebrows. "What was his offer? Did he want you to ride a performing elephant?"

"No. To be a whole show by myself; Henry Jordan, ballyhoo artist and released murder suspect!" He outlined the proposition humorously, but Ed's face darkened.

"The low-down Yank!" he exclaimed. "He'd be strung up for less, down where I come from! A hound dog would have better instincts than that!"

"It's a question of point of view, that's all," remarked Henry, defensively. "Everything's grist that comes to his mill, and I guess he's had some pretty hard knocks in his time."

"No, suh!" Ed shook his head. "Ornery meanness like that is born, not cultivated. A poltroon who would offer such a proposition to a gentleman would be guilty of anything! I hope you put him in his place!"

Henry smiled again, realizing the futility of argument with the hot-headed young Southerner, and then abruptly turned the subject.

"Did you find out anything yourself while I was away?"

"Nothing. I talked with Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Moffat and even sounded Mr. Darley, but they all appear to have accepted the fact that Miss Fannie killed herself; they say it's always possible that somebody may have a secret trouble or sorrow, but there's got to be a motive for murder, and that motive is bound to come out, yet there just isn't any in this case. We'll have to look in another direction, Henry, but don't feel downhearted about it; we won't give up if it takes months to find out the truth!—May I offer you a drop more of my grandmother's remedy?"

Henry declined and when the other had gone he dragged off his wet clothes, spreading them carefully to dry before hanging them in the closet beside the newly-pressed coat, which, after all, had come back from the tailor, and crawled into bed. Since leaving Mrs. Culliver he had trudged from pawnshop to pawnshop in the vain hope that the thief had disposed of the ring in that fashion, but he realized such a method of search would prove unending. If the person who took the ring had had any previous experience, he would know of professional receivers of stolen goods whom Henry could never discover. It seemed a hopeless task that he had set for himself, and a sense of futility pervaded him as he fell asleep at last.

The sun was shining brightly when he awakened and found to his disgust that it was almost noon. Agnes had kept some fruit and coffee for him, however, and Mrs.

Horton hovered about him solicitously, but as he ate, his dilemma weighed upon him.

What was the next logical step to pursue? Were he the loser of the ring he would naturally have notified the police, but such a course now was out of the question and he felt as though a stone wall had suddenly loomed before him. There must be something under a million pawnshops in the city, yet he might even have visited the one where the object of his search reposed on the previous day and been easily hoodwinked by the proprietor, if the latter had divined from Henry's unskillful queries that he was in possession of a purloined article. Not in such fashion would he achieve his purpose!

Inaction only increased his perplexity and he tossed aside his paper half an hour later, and taking his hat and coat, started out for a brisk walk. North left the house early, Agnes had informed him, and he was glad of it, for he felt that he wanted to be alone to think. He must decide upon the next step and solitude was essential.

He changed his mind abruptly, however, when he descended the high front stoop and encountered Marian Gray at its foot. She was dressed in deep bluish violet that matched her eyes and he had no need to guess her errand, for she carried a neat but worn little prayer book.

"Good morning!" she smiled. "This is a change from yesterday, isn't it?"

"A—big change," he assented gravely. "You've been to church? I was just going for a walk in the park to

clear the cobwebs of late rising out of my head; you're not troubled that way, I see, but I wonder if you would care to come with me?"

"I'd love to," she replied with simple directness and, turning, fell into step beside him. "Did you see Mr. Newell?"

He darted a quick, sidelong glance at her serene face. Did she know of his quest, and approve? Her words of the previous day returned to his mind, that justice was yet to be done, and he drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he replied. "He thought that I had lost my position and wanted to offer me one, that was all. I thought it was very decent of him."

"Yes," Marian nodded. "You won't return to your own work for some weeks?"

"I don't know. I'd like to get back into harness again, it's the only thing left for me now, but I have something to accomplish. When that is done, I'll take up my work once more."

A silence fell between them and was broken only by desultory remarks until the park was reached. The storm of the previous day had wrought havoc here and there, but they came at last to a little path winding through tall trees heavy with luxuriant green, and here they seated themselves on a sun-warmed bench.

They were well away from the drive and only an occasional equestrian, galloping along the bridle path, broke the stillness with a rhythmic thud of hoofs on the soft loam, until a highly nervous but greedy squirrel arrived to chatter inquiringly at them.

With a sheepish laugh Henry produced a pocketful of nuts and Marian held out her hand.

"Oh, may I have some? I've been feeding them here since I came."

"Have you?" he asked in surprise. "I didn't know very many people had discovered this spot. I came alone after every big storm last winter, afraid I'd be laughed at for a soft-hearted fool if I told, but the little fellows got to know me. This must be a youngster."

The youngster had paused, his tail quivering, and after surveying them both with his bright, beady eyes, he chose Marian, climbing up fearlessly beside her. An older member of the clan appeared and promptly claimed Henry's attention, and not until the nuts were gone and the avid pair departed did they utter a serious word.

Then Marian turned to him.

"Do you really feel that there is nothing left for you but your work?" she asked softly. "It seems a pity, with all your life before you, but I suppose that doesn't mean so much when you've—you've lost what made it worth while to live."

Henry stared in honest surprise.

"Life's always been well worth living, and it is, even now, when I've been through what has got to keep me apart forever from the usual things that come into other people's lives. You didn't think I meant that my heart was broken? That was just a—a mutual mistake last winter and no harm came of it to—to any one," he stammered, feeling himself flushing hotly, but Marian's eyes were downcast. "I think you've guessed how I feel

about it, though, and what I'm going to do if it is humanly possible. It's all I owe to the past, but it is a debt that must be paid! If public justice has failed, the obligation rests on any one who—who cared once. I've had time to think it all out and realize my position. I'd like to go away and start somewhere all over again, but that would be cowardly, and I'd be a cheat among strangers who didn't know about me. If I've got to carry a brand I'll carry it openly and take my path alone."

"What is there to know about you, except that you have suffered for some one else?—That a terrible mistake has been made?" She lifted her clear eyes at last. "You carry no brand! It's just a hurt that will heal and you'll be all the stronger for it! Why, you've everything in the world before you! Your trouble hasn't set you apart, it's brought you all the closer to people who think and feel! I have guessed what you mean to do if you can and I—I honor you for it, but it didn't surprise me. You did care once, and there's no one else to clear her name now of the slur of suicide, and bring the criminal to punishment. I shall hope with all my heart for your success!"

They started homeward a little later, but a feeling of dazed wonder held Henry almost mute, and after the stuffy dinner he escaped Ed North's expectant presence and hurried from the house. The desire for solitude had returned greater than before, but from another reason.

What was this wonderful thing which had come to him? Marian understood everything and she had not

been surprised, she had expected it of him! More than all, she, whose opinion mattered more after just these few days than that of the whole world beside, did not feel that he was marked, degraded, even through no fault of his own. He had everything still before him, she had said. Did "everything" mean some time a girl like her?

But there was no one in all the world like her, he knew that. No one could ever understand as she did, no one could think his thoughts, look on things with his eyes, feel as he did, about the fundamentals of life! It was as though they two walked alone, together, and a swift, almost incredulous hope came like a song to his heart.

Perhaps, when he had succeeded in his quest and all the shadowed present was forgotten, he might sometime venture to ask her to walk beside him forever! She was all of life now, he realized that. Mistaken love had taught him to recognize the real depth of the emotion which surged within him, and as she had come to him in his darkest hour so he knew that only in her presence would there be light. Perhaps, sometime. . . .

Night had long since fallen again when he stole into the house, and this time Ed had evidently understood his evasion of the afternoon, for no one intercepted him and he went softly to his room.

To-morrow he would start out with renewed energy and hope, for now he must not fail! Surely, before morning, some plan would come to him! It had all been sheer luck, so far, but if fate had taken a hand, surely the way would open before him!

That diamond ring! Who besides Newell had known she found it? Who but Newell——?

Henry stifled a cry as the name flashed across his mind, seeming to bring with it a great, ghastly light. Newell!

CHAPTER XX

THE MAN IN GRAY

HENRY sank down upon the side of his bed. The thought which had come to him was blinding, dazzling, in its significance, yet with a sudden, swift clarity of vision his mind raced back over his interview on the previous day with the proprietor of the "Avalanche Ride," and in every well-remembered word he found confirmation.

Benjamin Newell knew better than any one else how the ring had come into Fannie's possession. He said he "knew sparklers"—he probably had good reason to! He must have known from the instant his eyes rested upon it that the diamond was real and of great value; had the plan been forming in his mind then to despoil the girl of it even while he assured her that it was merely paste, like the cheap little trinkets which satisfied her uncritical taste?

No definite way of robbing her of it had apparently occurred to him then, but he made an engagement to take her out on the following Wednesday night, probably trusting that some plan would come to him in the meantime. He must have weighed the risk of another's discovery that the jewel was genuine before then, but per-

force accepted it, and if a scheme did formulate itself in his mind it must have miscarried on that Wednesday, and he grew desperate!

How the thought of crime first entered his mind and the steps he took to accomplish it, whether or not he were the man whom Mrs. Moffat had seen loitering in the areaway across the street on that Tuesday evening, and what vital need could have driven him to such a frightful act, were details which Henry did not trouble to consider then. Newell supposed he had seen the ring and heard the story of its finding from Fannie's own lips; he admitted as much and it was evident from his manner that he would not have referred to it otherwise, but he had wasted no time in assuring his caller that there was no doubt of its being a fake stone.

Sending for the just-vindicated man had been a stroke of genius on his part. If his proposition had been accepted he would at one gesture have placed Henry under his eye where he could watch his every move and discover if his continued interest in the case was likely to prove a menace, and also have reaped a handsome profit by exploiting him and his shame and suffering! He had offered more for a season of Henry's time than the ring would have brought three times over in pawn or at outright sale, but the young man realized bitterly that as a drawing card to attract the morbidly curious he would have brought a far greater sum to the little window beside the turnstile.

No tender sentiment had existed in Newell's heart for Fannie, to give him the slightest twinge of compunction

for the dastardly crime! He had been proud of her appearance, her prettiness and style, she amused him, but when all at once she stood between him and a large amount of money he had apparently wiped her out of existence as unconcernedly as he would have twisted the neck of a kitten!

He had a tremendously strong grip, Henry recalled. Only once, somewhere lately, had he seen fingers so strong! The ring must have been sold at once, of course, or pawned. . . .

Then all at once a strange thought came to Henry Jordan. It shot across his brain like a lightning streak, searing and shrivelling, and he lay staring into the darkness with wide eyes in which the light of an astounding revelation slowly dawned. It seemed so incredible that he cogitated for long and then springing from his bed, began to dress quickly but noiselessly. When he was fully clothed once more he put out the light and taking his hat in his hand slipped silently from the room.

It was almost dawn when he returned and his deeply lined face, as he lit the gas again with a shaking hand, betrayed the hideous, long-sustained strain through which he had passed, but his eyes glittered oddly as, after locking the door, he seated himself and drew from his pocket a slip of paper.

It was a pawnticket, issued on the twentieth of the preceding May to one "John Nicholas" for eight hundred dollars, loaned by D. Uhlfelder of Third Avenue, on a solitaire diamond ring. May twentieth! The very day of the murder! "John Nicholas" had lost no time in dis-

posing of the wretched jewel which had cost a life! There remained only to prove that it was the one which Mrs. Culliver had lost and that "Nicholas" was the man he suspected, and his task would be ended.

He'd heard somewhere that when a person used an alias he instinctively chose one with the surname, at least, beginning with the same letter as his own name; it was a slender thread, but it formed part of a fabric of circumstantial evidence that was gradually assuming unbreakable proportions.

Coincidence or not, miracle, blind chance, or a deliberate gift of the gods, Henry felt that his theory must prove true; the ring in Uhlfelder's keeping was the one which Fannie had found and for the possession of which she had been killed, and the man who pawned it was he whose hands had drawn the rope about her throat!

With a twitching, haggard face and nervous tremors shaking his whole body, Henry alternately paced the floor and sat sunk in profound thought until dawn broke fully, and when at last he threw himself down for an hour of uneasy slumber it was to start up again with a cry of horror from a hideous, distorted dream. He took a cold shower, dressed again and hurried down to the dining-room before Agnes had finished setting the table.

She brought him some breakfast, however, and he gulped it down and left the house, going straight across town to Third Avenue.

The shutters of Uhlfelder's pawnshop had evidently just been taken down, and the loan broker himself came forward from the back of his store and bent inquiringly

over the counter, in which reposed the usual miscellany of cheap jewelry and battered silverware. He was a mild-appearing little old man with a long, rather sad countenance and a compassionate look in his faded eyes as though the countless tales of sorrow and bitter need to which he had listened through the years had laid a burden upon his spirit. He pushed the skull-cap far back upon his bald, wrinkled head and then spread his claw-like hands on the counter as he peered at Henry through gold-bowed spectacles.

"What can I do for you, young man?"

His voice was gentle, almost deprecating, and he waited expectantly as Henry produced the ticket, but shielded it with his palm.

"A diamond ring was pawned here on the twentieth of last May," Henry began without preamble. "You lent my friend eight hundred dollars on it and I bought the ticket from him the other day. Never mind what he sold it to me for, I'd like to see the ring and find out if I got stung or not. If it isn't worth what I paid and the interest I won't bother to take it out, but I'll see that he buys this back, all right! It's number 224097."

The old man nodded and rubbed his chin as he studied his visitor with shrewdly appraising eyes. What he read in Henry's face seemed to reassure him, for he nodded again and asked:

"What is your friend's name?"

"John Nicholas," responded Henry promptly. "It's a lady's ring, belonged to his dead sister, in fact, and he was only keeping it to have the diamond reset sometime

for himself, but he told me he'd made up his mind it'd look too sporty. If he came clean, it's a solitaire, blue-white and over three carat in weight——"

"That's it!" D. Uhlfelder gave vent to a gaping-toothed smile and held out his hand for the ticket. "I remind myself well of it, for not often does such a beauty come to my store! I shall not be sorry if you do not redeem it, young man, for it is worth much more, but the diamond market was uncertain then and my cash was low. So many loans do I make in the spring, fur coats and household goods, that people perhaps do not mean to take out again, that I cannot give to your friend more than eight hundred. He is not pleased, but it is the best I can do; moreover it is a lady's ring, as you say, and I do not know your friend, I must be careful."

"I don't know him very well, either!" Henry forced a laugh. "That's why I wanted to see the ring before I drew my money out of the bank. I'm getting it for a—a lady."

A solitaire, blue-white and weighing over three carats! Uhlfelder had confirmed Mrs. Culliver's description! It was the ring! Henry could scarcely contain himself as the old man rubbed his hands together, still bobbing his head and smiling, the ticket lying upon the counter between them.

"A lady? Ah, then I am glad you get it, my young friend! No lady could have a handsomer jewel! Often have I taken it from my safe to admire it and much happiness should it bring!"

Henry shuddered as Uhlfelder picked up the ticket

once more and pattered off toward the rear of the store. Happiness? It had brought crime to the quiet household across town, death to Fannie Gillespie, and the unspeakable ignominy and torturing suspense of the unfounded accusation to himself! Imperishable, what misery would it not bring to generations to come!

He shuddered again as the old man returned and laid before him a slender band of platinum with the single, glittering diamond seemingly poised upon it. To Henry's sickened eyes it appeared to wink wickedly up at him as though they shared between them some horrible secret, and he drew back in shrinking loathing.

"You are surprised, my young friend!" Uhlfelder had misinterpreted the gesture and he laughed in gleeful pleasure. "You did not believe it was so brilliant! See! Blue sparks it sends out as it is turned in the light! Most happy should the lady be to have such a treasure!"

Henry shook his head, contriving to throw a shade of dubiety in his tone.

"I don't know. Maybe it's a little too showy." He could think of no other excuse to one who did not know the sinister history he attributed to the jewel. "I guess I'd better have the lady see it, Mr. Uhlfelder. I'll go and get the money from the bank and bring her here in about an hour."

Three-quarters of an hour later a limousine drew up at a nearby corner under the rattling elevated road, and an eager face peered out. Then a hand beckoned and the liveried footman leaped from the box and opened the door as Henry approached, hat in hand.

"Good-morning!" Mrs. Culliver smiled nervously with a warning glance in the direction of the manservant. "That poor family you have brought me to see, Mr. Jones,—do they live near here?"

"Just around the corner," Henry replied. "I think it is better to walk, if you don't mind; your car would overawe them."

He eyed her critically as she alighted and turned to give a low-voiced direction to the footman, and Mrs. Culliver did not fail to observe his scrutiny, for once around the corner she asked:

"Is my appearance suitable? You asked me over the telephone to dress as plainly as I could."

Henry was no connoisseur but he felt vaguely that the dark suit in its artful simplicity betrayed the handiwork of an expensive tailleur most blatantly and the chic little hat reeked of Paris, but there was no help for it and he replied diplomatically:

"I am sure it is quite suitable, Mrs. Culliver. We are going to a loan broker's, you know, a pawnshop. I have just seen a ring there which I think is yours and you have only to identify it for the police to recover it for you without charge. It was pledged for eight hundred."

"I'll redeem it if it really is mine," Mrs. Culliver announced. "I wouldn't want an innocent person to lose because of a dishonest one, and then, too, my husband would be furious if I called in the police."

"You must decide that, of course," Henry agreed. "I had to tell a plausible story in order to see the ring at all,

so please remember that you are a—a friend of mine and I am supposed to be buying the ring for you. If it is not yours, simply say you do not like it, that it's too big a stone, or something, but if it is yours, we can tell the truth to the pawnbroker. He'll be only too glad to get rid of it without trouble from the authorities."

Uhlfelder advanced beaming upon them, but at a closer view of the lady his lean jaw dropped and an anxious look came into his eyes. Mrs. Culliver came shrewdly to the rescue.

"I'm crazy to see the ring!" she gushed. "My—my friend says it's lovely, but I'm afraid it may be too big a diamond——"

"Not a bit, ma'am!" the old man interrupted. "Fit for a princess is it, but not loud, not flashy! See! It is wonderful, yes?"

"It's mine!" Mrs. Culliver cried with an utter change of tone. "I'd know it anywhere, and see how it fits me!" She had torn off her glove and slipped the ring on her finger. "The person who pawned it was as bad as a thief even if he did find it!"

"You positively identify it?" Henry asked as Uhlfelder backed away from the counter in wordless dismay. "Can you prove that it is yours?"

"My husband can!" the lady exclaimed. "He can bring the jeweler here who sold it to him!"

"My God!" The old man raised tremulous hands. "Never have I taken stolen goods, never have I had trouble with the police! For forty years I am in business——!"

"You'll have no trouble!" Mrs. Culliver interrupted. "You see, I really did lose it and whoever picked it up must have brought it to you. I'll redeem it for the full value of the ticket and the police will never know——"

"They must!" Henry interrupted in his turn and something in his tone made them both turn and stare at him, the ring for the moment forgotten. "The police must know, and I'm afraid you won't have your diamond again right away, Mrs. Culliver! The person who picked it up from the sand where it dropped from your finger didn't bring it here. She thought it was just a fake stone as she had been led to believe and five days later she was murdered for it!"

"Murdered!" Mrs. Culliver gave a little shriek. "Oh, how terrible! How do you know? Who are you!"

"A woman—killed!" Uhlfelder's hands clutched at his bare temples. "My God! My God!"

"A young girl," Henry went on, his voice curiously level. "She was strangled with a piece of clothesline and her body hung to the bedpost to make it look as if she had committed suicide. But she was murdered for that ring there, and the eight hundred that it brought!"

"The Gillespie case!" the old man gasped. "You——! I thought I knew you, your face was it familiar and now I remind myself! In the papers you have been, only last week! You are——!"

"Yes, I'm Jordan, the fellow who was held for murdering her!" Henry announced grimly. "I'm here now to find out who really did kill her, who 'Nicholas' is who pawned the ring! Come, Uhlfelder, you say you

remember when it was brought to you; what did the man look like?"

"He—he was young and dark! Darker than you, and very slim, with shoulders like a woman!" faltered the old man. "He looked like a fine young gentleman and carried himself with a strut but he talked quick, and so much slang he used! I couldn't understand him, hardly, though he was not like a tough. Never would I have thought him a gunman, a crook, and as for a murderer——! My God! It cannot be!"

Dark, slim, "with shoulders like a woman!" Slangy and quick of speech—it was the man he suspected to the life!

"Was his hair dark, too, and slicked down?" Henry demanded.

"You know him!" exclaimed Uhlfelder. "Flat his hair was, and shiny, and he wore a fine gray suit, very light and elegant, of good cloth and the latest cut. I figured that easy I could let him have twelve dollars on it if he'd brought it to me then and still I shouldn't stand to lose nothing! That was when he first came in, you understand, but when he pulled out that ring I wasn't thinking of suits any more! He wanted fifteen hundred, but that was just asking. It was good business, though he knew the stone wasn't worth that, he was nobody's fool! Six hundred I offered him and came up to eight—a thousand I would have gone, but he was too anxious, so enough was enough! He took it and I wrote the name he gave me—'Nicholas'—on that ticket. If it is not his, am I a mind reader that I should know?"

His bony arms were gesticulating wildly now and his shaking voice had taken on a thin, strident note. Mrs. Culliver was leaning on the counter sobbing hysterically, but for the moment neither noticed her.

"What time did he come, on the twentieth?" Henry pursued.

"In the afternoon, late," the old man answered without an instant's hesitation. "That much I remind myself, but not the hour."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"Not before or since, have I seen him, yet I should know him again," asserted Uhlfelder solemnly, his tones losing that high, hysterical note. "Show me the young man! I tell you quick, is it or isn't it 'Nicholas'!"

"The police will do that!" Henry promised and Mrs. Culliver wrung her hands.

"Oh, don't drag me into it!" she moaned. "My husband would never forgive me and what have I done? I don't know anything about this terrible affair, I only happened to lose my own ring there on the beach, and if the girl had been honest enough to look for my advertisement she wouldn't have died——!"

"She thought it was only a fake, you know," Henry reminded her, patiently. "There'll be no scandal for you if you don't try to leave town.—Uhlfelder, I'll hold you responsible for that ring, and mind you don't open your mouth about it till a man comes here to see you from headquarters.—I think his name will be 'Stevenson.' Mrs. Culliver, I'll have to turn this ticket in as evidence,

but you know where your ring is and you'll get a receipt for it. Shall I take you back to your car?"

For the rest of the day Henry rushed about the city in desperate haste from booking offices to a pretentious gray stone house on the Drive, and after a hurried trip to Brooklyn he returned to visit various modest apartment houses and a boarding-house or two in the theatrical district.

It was midnight before he dragged himself home at last and tumbled into bed, but he was grimly content. To-morrow would see the end of it all! To-morrow he would face "Nicholas" with the truth!

CHAPTER XXI

STEVENSON RECEIVES AN OFFER

AFTER breakfast the next morning, Henry drew Ed North aside.

"I'm afraid you'll think I've treated you pretty shabbily, old man, when we made that compact and all," he began. "I did have a little more I could have told you, but I wanted to test it out first and I promised myself that if there was anything in my theory, I'd let you in on it before the finish. Ed, I think I'm nearing it!"

"No!" Ed exclaimed, flushing with excitement. "I kept out of your way because I thought I was intruding, that you-all didn't want my company! I didn't know you were working alone on your problem! What have you found out? Was it really murder?"

"Not so loud!" Henry warned with a glance over his shoulder into the dining-room. "We can't talk here, and I suppose you'll have to hurry down to that bond trader's——"

"No, they're sending me over to Philadelphia to-day, but I'll be back here right early!" The soft, liquid drawl had quickened. "I ought to reach the city by six or seven this evening."

"Then I've a lot to talk over with you, Ed; you'll have the surprise of your life! Maybe another fellow or so

will come to see me, but they won't know my real object in asking them. I want you to listen to them."

"I'll be right glad to come!" Ed smiled. "I can't see what you're getting at, Henry, but I reckon you-all know mighty well what you're doing and I'm tickled clear down to the ground to know that you're willing to let me be in at the death! I'll go to your room straight from dinner."

Henry's investigations that morning took him into vastly different sections of the city than on the day before and noon found him at a huge rambling building far down on Center Street. He ascended wide, shallow steps, hurried down an echoing corridor and paused before a door at the end which bore in large, plain letters the words "Homicide Bureau."

He had paid one previous visit to police headquarters, but that had been in the enforced company of Stevenson immediately after his arrest, when he had been subjected to a protracted and grilling examination the memory of which still made him shudder. Now his mission was in connection with the same affair, but his presence had not been solicited and would certainly be unwelcome unless he succeeded in convincing his hearer that he would be able to make good his assertions.

With a little smile he opened the door and walked in.

A broad rail divided the space immediately about him from the main part of the room which was large and light, with desks and typewriter tables scattered about. At the nearest of these a bull-necked heavy-browed young

man sat turning over a sheaf of papers, but he glanced up and then rising, came forward.

"What do you want?" he asked. His voice was abrupt, but as his eyes ran quickly over the visitor a sharp gleam of recognition came into them. "Are you looking for Stevenson, Jordan?"

"Yes. I've got a little information for him." Henry could not recall having seen his questioner before but cynically the reminder came to him; of course he was "known" at headquarters, now!

The burly young man thrust one hand negligently into his coat pocket and with the other opened the gate in the rail.

"He's 'way over there, at the end." He had raised his voice a trifle and now he called: "Hey, Steve! Somebody wants to see you!"

Henry was serenely unconscious of the fact that the announcement had been a well-understood warning and he was being covered every step of his progress across the room. Stevenson had looked around with an almost imperceptible nod and now he greeted the other in a brisk, business-like tone.

"Hello, Jordan! What's on your mind?"

"A lot, but most of it would be Greek to you now!" Henry responded cheerfully. "I've got a little dope for you, that's all. No hard feelings, I hope, because you failed to put it over last week? The Lord knows you tried hard enough!"

He laughed as he spoke, but he had used the word "failed" with intent and the allusion told. Stevenson

grinned a little wryly but there was evident relief in the relaxation of his tensed figure.

"Dope, eh!" His tone was weary but tolerant. "Here, sit down, Jordan. Sure I tried to get you held for trial, for I thought I had the straight goods on you, but the guys on the grand jury didn't agree with me."

"If you still think so you're due for a surprise," remarked Henry. "I know you were on the level about it and that's why I've come to you now. It wouldn't be fair to have a precinct man put it over on you after all your work, but you're laying down on the job——"

"I am, eh?" Stevenson interrupted quickly with an assumption of bluster. "You're out of it now, young feller, but I don't mind telling you I'm on a new lead——"

"Don't tell me! Save it for the newspaper boys!" Henry exclaimed. "They'll listen to it till they're tired hearing it, or a new case comes up. Old stuff, Stevenson! You fell down once. What'd you give to land the man who put that rope around Fannie Gillespie's neck?"

Something in the earnest hush which had fallen upon his voice and the steady, purposeful light in his eyes made the detective straighten in his chair.

"I'd give my next chance up before the Board for promotion!" he declared. "Look here, Jordan! When a guy like you, that's been let out for lack of sufficient evidence, comes around with theories and suggestions we don't pay much attention to him as a rule; we figure he's gone kind of bugs about the case and let him down easy, but with you it's different. I'm glad enough to listen

and if I think there's anything in what you've got I'll look into it."

Henry smiled again and shook his head.

"You don't understand. I've got the man but you've got nothing! I'll do what there is to be done myself, in my own way and my own time. I just thought you'd like to be there to gather him in, that's all."

"What's the idea?" Stevenson flushed. "If you're playing a hunch you can go it alone, but if you've got facts, proof, concrete evidence, come across! Amateur stuff don't get over in a big pinch; you let me handle it, providing you've treed the right bear."

"The evidence is concrete enough and I've got it, or rather, somebody is keeping it for me. You'd never get it in a million years because you wouldn't know how to begin looking for it, though if you read the papers you had it under your eyes days before the murder was committed." Henry paused and added: "I'm not bragging or trying to get a rise out of you, Stevenson, I'm just telling you what I can now. You got the dope on me and some other fellows who admired Fannie Gillespie, to put it mildly, and you figured that there couldn't be any other motive for her murder than jealousy or revenge for getting turned down, but there was, though the poor girl didn't even know it herself!"

"Didn't know it!" the detective echoed, blankly. "What kind of bunk are you handing me?"

"That's what Fannie Gillespie thought it was—bunk!" Henry nodded. "Up to a few days before her death there wasn't a reason in the world why anybody should

want to kill her. I knew that, but I didn't know that something had happened then which made it worth while to put her out of the way, according to the murderer's opinion. That's what stumped me, there being no motive. When they let me go last week I was about ready to think she must have killed herself, after all, but something kept telling me she didn't. I talked it over with another fellow at the boarding-house—you remember that young Southerner, North, I guess?"

"Yes!" Stevenson snapped. "Go on!"

"Well, he offered to help me do a little investigating on my own account, and he's been great! Without realizing it himself he's put me on to some points that meant everything! I don't believe I could have worked it out if it hadn't been for him, and though I've kept my discoveries to myself, I'm going to tell him everything to-night, for it's only coming to him.—However, that first talk with him after I was set free strengthened my opinion that Fannie hadn't committed suicide, and on an off chance Thursday night I ran up to Bison to see her brother."

"Her brother!" The detective stared. "I pumped that hick dry!"

"Not about Fannie's babyhood," murmured Henry.

"Her—what!——!"

"Did you know there was something odd about her, a fear that she was born with and never got over? I learned something else from her brother, too, but never mind about that now. I was right behind Burke when he broke down her door; you saw everything a little later

just as we found it. Nothing had been changed or touched. Do you remember that room?"

"Of course!" There was a quickened, eager interest in Stevenson's voice now.

"Was the gas lighted?"

"No. The daylight——"

"It was black night at the time of her death, as the autopsy showed, and yet Fannie Gillespie never slept without a light! She didn't get up and hang herself and then turn the gas off, either! She was afraid of the dark, it was almost a mania with her, born in her! That nurse across the way saw the light put out in her room, but it was the murderer's hand did that! Fannie never killed herself, there in the darkness!"

The detective swore softly under his breath.

"Who was it?" he demanded hoarsely. "Who killed her? Where is he?"

"North and I will have him for you to-night," Henry promised in a quiet tone. "I'm offering to hand him over to you, evidence and all. Do you want him?"

"Do I want my right eye?" Stevenson ejaculated. "Lead me to him, Jordan!"

"All right. North's coming to my room to-night right after dinner so that I can tell him what I've been doing, independent of him. Another fellow will join us later, maybe more, and I'm not even going to tell North that you're there, hidden, for he isn't good at bluffing and he might give it away by his manner to the others. Come about five and I'll let you in myself so the rest of the household won't know you're there, and if you want to

bring any of the boys with you I can hide you all in my closet or the bath on the same floor. I'm going to lead the way to another room in the house, on the top floor. You understand? I'll give a key to a certain man to open the door and that'll be your cue to get busy. Nab him while the nabbing's good, for he won't hand himself over without a fight for it, or perhaps even an attempt to cheat the chair!" Henry rose. "Remember, Stevenson, the man to whom I give the key."

CHAPTER XXII

HENRY KEEPS HIS WORD

“**I** SUPPOSE we might have gone to a restaurant somewhere to have the talk and meet the other fellows, Ed, but I thought this would be better if by any chance somebody is watching me.”

Dinner was over at Mrs. Horton's that night and the rest of the boarders had scattered for diversion or rest, but the two young men were seated comfortably smoking together in Henry's room.

“Somebody watching you, Henry?” Ed looked up quickly. “The authorities won't bother you-all any more after failing once to get you held fo' trial even if they're sho't-headed enough to think still that you had something to do with it!”

“I don't mean the police.” Henry raised his voice a trifle as the door of his clothes closet creaked. “I've got an idea that somebody is enough interested in what I may be doing from purely personal motives. I confessed this morning that I'd been holding out on you, Ed, but the truth is, I was a little bit nettled when I talked with you Saturday night and found you were so ready to think the same as everybody else seems to, that it was suicide.”

“My dear Henry, how could I know if you were keep-

ing something back?" There was mild reproach in Ed's tone, and Henry nodded understandingly.

"I told you I'd learned a lot of trivial things from Fannie's brother that made me more sure than ever she never killed herself, but when you didn't seem to take any stock in it I didn't tell you one certain thing that proved it; I made up my mind I'd wait and confound your skepticism with the whole truth!"

"And you've got it now?" Ed asked eagerly. "What proved to you-all that Miss Fannie was murdered!"

"The man who did it was careful not to leave any tracks behind him, but he was too careful, and there was something about her that he didn't know. He made one mistake; he turned out the light!"

Ed stared as Stevenson had done that morning.

"What had that to do with it?" Surprise wiped the slow drawl from his tones.

"Everything! It proved some one else was in that room, for Fannie never turned the gas out herself! She hadn't slept or been in the dark for five minutes in all her life. She couldn't stand it from birth; she was marked!"

"Good—Lord!" Ed ground out his cigarette stub in the ashtray. "Who in the world would have thought of that? Still, it isn't exactly proof. Miss Fannie may have lost courage, at the last. They say women do. She may have turned out the gas the ve'y minute before she stood up on that chair——!"

"Still doubting?" Henry leaned forward. "What if I told you, Ed, that I knew why she was killed? I've got the proof, the thing she was killed for! I know the

man who did it and so do you—at least, you’ve heard of him. I talked with him only the other day!”

“Are you in earnest, Henry?” Ed’s voice had dropped to a whisper, but the other’s lifted a little more and he replied very distinctly.

“In dead earnest! Shall I tell you about it now, describe the crime to you as I’ve reconstructed it? On the Sunday before Fannie’s death she found a ring with a single large diamond in it down in the sand at Knickerbocker Beach. The man who was with her told her it was a fake, but it happened to be the real thing, weighing over three carats and worth more than a thousand dollars.”

“A ring!” exclaimed Ed. “How do you know? Who told you about it and that it was real?”

“The woman who lost it there only a few hours before Fannie uncovered it. I’ve found the ring and she has identified it; I’ve got a description of the man—but I’ll tell you that when I come to it. The man who actually killed Fannie knew the ring was genuine the first time he laid his eyes on it and he made up his mind he’d get it. A thousand dollars more or less don’t seem very much to take a human life for, but murder’s been done for a much smaller amount than that, and this man needed a few hundred, needed it pretty bad!

“I don’t think he planned to kill her at first, though; I think he meant to get possession of it in an easier way than that and with less risk of being caught. He didn’t feel a bit squeamish about wiping her out if the show-down came, but he wasn’t taking a chance himself of

going to the chair! Maybe he thought he could get the ring away from her in some manner that would lead her to think she had lost it and she wouldn't make much fuss, because she thought it was an imitation all the time, remember. I don't believe she ever learned the truth.

"Now, this is the way I've reconstructed what happened that night. The fellow broke in her room with some clothesline to tie her up and gag her if she woke. She knew him, of course, but I figure he may have rigged up a mask or something so that she wouldn't recognize him. What he thought about the gas being lighted and why he took a chance with it on, I don't know, but he did.

"Fannie woke up and recognized him! She let him see that she knew him, and that is what cost her her life! Before she could move, before she could utter a single cry, he had jumped for her and drawn that rope about her throat. He knew there was no alternative but to kill her, and he must have tightened that clothesline and held it till she stopped struggling and fell back limp, dead!"

"God!" Ed moistened his lips, shuddering. He sat facing his host, with his back turned squarely to the closet door, but it had opened an inch or two, and Henry could feel Stevenson's eyes on him as he continued:

"I guess he felt pretty sick then, Ed; not because he'd taken the life of a defenseless young thing like that, for such a beast wouldn't know what remorse was, but because it was murder! He knew what he'd be up against if he was caught, and it was more than he'd bargained for!"

"But—but Miss Fannie wasn't strangled!" gasped Ed, his face livid with horror. "She was found hanging——!"

"Yes," Henry nodded. "It was then the bright idea must have come to him, to make the whole thing look like suicide! I don't mean that he stood there calmly thinking the thing out with her poor body lying before him, I think it came to him in a flash! Fannie could have gone up on the roof and cut a piece off that clothesline as easily as he or anybody else could, and as for the reason—well, a girl as pretty as she was and receiving attention from so many fellows might have had one love affair among the rest that turned out unhappily.

"I don't know whether he thought of that or not, but a dozen different motives might have been thought of for her suicide and he probably figured there wouldn't be much stir about it. Fannie was a business girl just boarding here in town and nobody'd care enough to inquire too closely into her death. The police would be notified, of course, there'd be some questions asked of the folks in the house and her friends, a couple of lines in the papers, and then the body would be shipped back to her home, wherever it was, and that would be the end of it.

"Maybe that didn't all strike him till later; I guess he must have worked quick, once the idea came to him. He fixed that rope around the high brass post on the headboard of her bed—you've never seen it, Ed, but I did when I followed the policeman in after he broke down the door, and it reaches almost to the ceiling. He couldn't

have had a very easy time of it stringing her up there, callous and hardened as he was; it must have been grisly work, a ghastly job! Her body was so soft and helpless, almost as small as a child's——"

"For God's sake, Henry!" Ed covered his eyes with his hand, and his companion saw beads of perspiration start upon his forehead. "Your description—it's frightful! No one could be such a—a fiend!"

"Somebody was!" Henry returned. He glanced uneasily toward the closet, for it seemed incredible that his companion should not be aware of the heavy breathing which issued now so audibly from it.

"Go on with what you've found out and don't try to imagine the rest!" Ed begged. "It's enough to make anybody see ghosts!"

"I wonder if he ever does—that man?" Henry shrugged. "Probably not; a fellow who could commit such a crime in cold blood wouldn't likely be troubled with visions, Ed. He wouldn't be as thin skinned as you and I! Anyway, when he'd finished, he wasn't so affected by what he'd done that he didn't remember to take up a chair and lay it down sidewise underneath where Fannie's body was hanging in order to make it look as if she'd kicked it over, and if he hadn't found the ring before she woke up and recognized him he must have taken it then, for right after that I figure, was when the nurse across in the other house saw the light go out! He couldn't have done what he did in the dark!"

"Go on!" Ed cried again. The door creaked loudly, but he did not heed.

"Oh, he must have gotten out of the room the same way he got in," Henry replied. "It was that afternoon when he pawned the ring."

"Pawned it?" Ed looked up quickly. "Henry, how in the world did you ever discover that!"

"I found the ticket and learned enough to work the whole thing out to the end." Henry gradually straightened in his chair. "I'm curious to know, though, what the man's sensations were when the suicide theory, he had set the stage for so carefully, was dropped like a shot and I was arrested for the crime."

"He probably saw that it was only because of your letters, if he was as infernally clever as you make him out to be!"

Ed started to light a fresh cigarette, but the match went out. "He wouldn't have to be right smart to know you couldn't be convicted on such evidence as that!"

"I don't know about that; I think he hoped I'd be indicted and held for trial when he saw how easily the suicide theory was set aside," Henry remarked. "Then if a verdict had been brought in against me it would have put him forever beyond the reach of suspicion."

"That's too much!" Ed shook his head and struck another match. "You—you-all had me going, as you say up No'th here, but it isn't possible! Miss Fannie may have lost that ring in her turn and somebody else picked it up and pawned it. Then where would you be with that horrible notion of yours, Henry? I'm not trying to discourage you, but the more I think about it the more it

seems like you-all had imagined it! You haven't ever told me who the man is you suspect!"

"You haven't asked me yet how I think the man got in and out of the room," Henry reminded him. Something like a muffled snort came from the depths of the closet, but it was promptly checked.

"Through the window, as the detective claimed?" Ed smiled.

"No. He unlocked the door and walked in."

"'Walked in!' " The other stared again. "But the door was locked on the inside!"

"The key stuck out through the lock and he gripped the end of it with a pair of pliers and turned it!" There was a rising note of excitement in Henry's voice as he sprang from his chair. "Come on and I'll show you how it was done! I meant to wait till the other fellow showed up, but maybe he won't come and we'll have to go after him. I want to convince you thoroughly and no one will see us; there isn't anybody above the basement, except Mrs. Horton, and she's safe in her own room."

He led the way to the hall and up the stairs and Ed followed, fastidiously reluctant and voicing a low, almost whispered, protestation.

From the bedroom they left there issued a stocky figure and at the same moment two more, red-faced and burly, emerged from the bathroom. With the agility of cats all three crept in the wake of the couple ahead, making no slightest sound.

"The marks of the pliers were on the key itself,

Ed," Henry cut short his companion's murmurs as they reached the top floor and paused before the small rear door. "I saw them myself when I examined it before the detective took me away, and they're on it yet!—Look!"

As he added the last word in a loud, ringing tone, he drew a key from his pocket and there on the threshold of the dead girl's room he thrust it into the hand of Edgar North. On the instant three stalwart figures sprang from behind the young Southerner and hurled themselves upon him, and a shot hurtled up to the ceiling as a gleaming revolver was sent spinning from his grasp.

A shrill shriek and the sound of hurriedly opened doors came from below as North flung back his head and stood panting and dishevelled in the hands of his captors.

"You're under arrest, Flash!" Stevenson exclaimed, his low, sharp tone cutting through the rising tumult from downstairs. "You killed Fannie Gillespie!"

"Sure I did!" A slow smile broke over North's dark face. "It took your fall guy, though, to get the goods on me! I throttled her for the sparkler, but I overplayed when I put out that light!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LIGHT ENDURING

“**H**E talked, all right!” Stevenson strode into a private room at headquarters and closed the door with a slam. “I’ve seen his kind before. He knows it’s all up with him and he’s proud of the way he pulled it off and got away with it, all this time.”

Henry shivered. He felt cold and sick, now that it was over, and the nervous reaction was almost overwhelming, though with an effort he pulled himself together.

“You called him ‘Flash’!” he exclaimed. “How was it you recognized him then and not before?”

“I didn’t!” Stevenson confessed. “One of the boys with me, though, has just come back after nearly a year’s work on a case in New Orleans and he spotted him, the minute we followed you up the stairs, from his pictures. He’s badly wanted down there.”

Henry nodded.

“He’s ‘Nico’ Norton, alias ‘Flash Nick,’ isn’t he? I saw his picture myself, over in the Rogue’s gallery in Brooklyn this afternoon and recognized him at once. I’d gone there on the off chance that he might have a record. It’s grand larceny in half-a-dozen different states, isn’t it?”

"Yes. He told me just now that he had to beat it back up here and there was some question about a split on the last trick with some of his pals. He was in bad, and it meant a bullet or a knife in his back if he didn't produce eight hundred dollars in three days. He'd gone broke, gambling, and he was at his wit's end when he went to that dance down at Brewster Hall, on the seventeenth of May, to see what he could pick up. It was a public ball, Jordan, the kind anybody can buy a ticket to, and it was apt to draw a lot of women with bunches of jewelry." Stevenson sat forward in his chair. "North—or Norton—didn't have any luck there, but he spotted Fannie Gillespie with a thousand dollars on her finger; he could tell that rock among all the phony stuff she was wearing and he trailed when Jack Rogers took her home."

"Then it was he whom Mrs. Moffat saw in the area-way?"

The detective nodded.

"He'd never seen the Gillespie girl before, of course, but he spent the next couple of days spying out the lay and then presented himself as a new boarder. Thursday afternoon, before he'd been in the house an hour, he heard Agnes arguing with the cook about hanging clothes up on the roof and she gave him his idea. He went to the roof early in the evening and got the rope, and the rest of the affair worked out exactly as you described it to him!—By the way, your knife was down in the dining-room on the mantelshelf and he took it as he left the dinner table. That Agnes must have carried it out of your room and forgotten to return it. North used it to

cut the clothesline and then threw it over into the yard of the house next door.—Now, Jordan, suppose you come clean and tell me how you happened to make us all look like two-spots down here?”

“I don’t know,” Henry responded gravely. “I don’t know myself except that I owed it to her to find out!”

He told his story up to the Sunday night when he began to suspect Benjamin Newell, and then added:

“Of course, I saw only Newell behind it all, but suddenly a fresh idea came to me. It must have taken pretty powerful hands to—to strangle Fannie Gillespie with that rope! When I went to see Newell he’d shaken my hand so hard I thought the bones were crushed, but another picture came into my mind, too; the picture of Ed North pulling that cork out of the jug on Saturday night with just a twist of his fingers!

“Then I thought of what must have been done with the ring, and that it would have been as easy for North to have pawned it as Newell, and all at once I recalled something else! That pawnticket which had fallen out of his wallet that day he took me to lunch down by the river front and offered to help me find Fannie’s murderer. I thought then that he acted more upset for fear I’d seen it, than just because it hurt his pride, and absolute conviction swept over me!

“I made up my mind that he’d kept the ticket because he knew he hadn’t got anywhere near the full value of the ring on it and he meant to take it out as soon as he was in funds and sell it for more, and it was up to me to get possession of it.

"I dressed and went out to the nearest all-night drug-store for some chloroform to kill a dog—they weren't too particular there, I knew, for I'd seen them passing out dope,—and I sneaked back into the house and hid on the stairs just outside North's door for the light in his room to go out. I guess he wasn't any too easy in his mind, for I'd been avoiding him for the past day or two, and maybe he figured I was beginning to get on to the truth. Anyway I could hear him moving up and down in there and finally when he did turn out the gas it was almost daylight.

"I waited twenty minutes more, however, and then got in his room—you know my line of business and there aren't many locks that could stand against me!—and clapped my handkerchief soaked with chloroform down over his face. I held it there till he stopped wriggling, but I don't believe he actually woke up, nor knew any one was there; I think he figured the next day that it was just a nightmare, for he couldn't even have looked for the pawnticket or he would have known that it was gone and beaten it. I got it out of his wallet easy enough, took my handkerchief and went out, locking the door with a twist of wire around the key.

"In the morning I went to Uhlfelder and the old pawnbroker's description fitted him to a T. North was the only stranger in the house, he come to Mrs. Horton's just the afternoon before Fannie was killed, and the whole thing was clear."

"And we let it slip us!" Stevenson growled in disgust. "There he was right under our noses all the time, for he

tells me he figured it wouldn't be good policy for him to clear out right away!"

"Well, it was that ticket, and the light being turned off, that put him in our hands," Henry resumed. "This morning—no, yesterday!—I waylaid him after he left the breakfast table and made that date with him for the evening; and then before I came down here to you I went to that firm dealing in bonds for whom he worked and learned enough to prove what I suspected—that he only held down that job as a blind. The rest you know, Stevenson. Of course he only sought me out after the grand jury let me go, and offered to help me if I was going to keep up the inquiry into Fannie Gillespie's death, in order to watch me and know how near I was likely to come to the truth. I've got a pretty strong hunch that if I'd gone on confiding in him I mightn't be here now to tell you what I have! I'm glad it's all over, but for heaven's sake keep me out of it as much as you can! *You* found out North was the murderer, *I* didn't! I've had enough notoriety to last me a lifetime and I'm only looking forward to his trial for one reason."

"What is it?" the detective asked. "The credit's all yours, Jordan, and I'll see that you get it, but what's the idea about the trial?"

"It'll come up on the calendar before Judge Carberry, won't it?"

"Yes!" Stevenson looked his surprise.

"I'm glad!" Henry drew a deep breath. "You see, I promised him on the night after I was set free that

I'd appear before him as a witness against the real murderer of Fannie Gillespie, and now I can keep my word!"

"The first of May," Mrs. Horton asseverated, "they're going to tear this house down with the others to put up a big storage warehouse, and I dunno's I'm sorry, for all I've been here more'n twenty years! I ain't had a happy minute nor a good night's sleep under this roof since I knew murder was done here, and the house had better be gone and take that memory along with it."

"You've made a great many people very happy here, though, during those years, Mrs. Horton!" Marian Gray's cheeks were delicately pink as she glanced across the shabby parlor at Henry, with a soft light in her eyes. "They'll always remember it, even when you've forgotten!"

"Well, I guess my sister needs me most now, with all them children and a husband that can't keep them in shoe-leather," she responded. "Besides, the whole household's going—you two getting married in April, and Myrtle going in vawdeville, and Mr. Darley taking his own bachelor rooms now he's in the firm. Mis' Moffat has connected up with a big Chicago house that's going to send her to Paris to do her buying instead of New York, and even Caroline's got an ambitious streak; she's thinking of opening a little eating-place up in her own neighborhood."

Henry laughed.

"How about Agnes?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll take her with me. She ain't got sense

enough to look out for herself unless I'm right at her heels." The front door bell rang and Mrs. Horton rose, eyeing the two young people remorsefully. "I dunno how I've got the heart to shoosh you out of the parlor, but there's that dratted piano tuner!"

In a curtained recess of the hall Marian and Henry lingered while a weazened little man with a worn bag passed them, and presently the maddeningly monotonous twanging commenced from the room they had just quitted, but they were oblivious to it.

"Henry," Marian whispered, "it must be hard for her to see the old house go!"

"There are compensations," Henry shook his head. "As long as she can find some one to mother, Mrs. Horton will be happy, and she is right about the house coming down. It's better so."

"You are thinking of—the murder." Marian looked down. "I feel sometimes as if we had no right to be so happy, Henry, while that poor girl who loved happiness, too, and bright lights, and all that they meant, should be shut away from it now forever!"

"We can't give them back to her by being unhappy, dear, and my debt to her memory is paid.—'The bright lights and all that they meant?' " Henry quoted as he took both her hands and held them close. "They mean nothing, sweetheart! We have found the light that endures!"

THE END

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